UNESCO COURIER

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PRISONS

a system in crisis

INTERVIEW WITH
SUSAN BUIRGE

ENVIRONMENT
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Indonesian boys work together on an outdoor task. Photo by Gede Gusti (Indonesia).

© Gede Gusti, Solo, Indonesia

In 1994, Archbishop Desmond Tutu called the new South Africa the "rainbow nation". Left, rainbow children pose with a cardboard cut-out of the famous cleric. Photo by Guy Hobbs (United Kingdom).

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A plane flies over the prison walls.
Photo taken by Guy Oprey while he was an inmate in London's Wandsworth prison
(see page 35).
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An institution on trial

BY EDMUNDO OLIVEIRA

Prison causes more ethical, social, psychological and economic problems than it solves. What can be done to improve the penal system?

In the late twentieth century, an age of supposedly scientific penology, humanity has far to go before it reaches that perfect state where it can do away with prisons. Modern society still finds it necessary to respond to crime with punishment.

The retributive character of penal measures stems directly from the nature of the apparatus used to fight crime. In spite of advances in criminology in discovering the causes of crime, there still remains a probability that crimes and misdemeanours will be committed, and the threat of sanctions as a deterrent is thus indispensable.

But if punishment is a necessity, it must not infringe certain inalienable human rights. Above all, penalties must be proportional to the wrong that has been caused and to the offender's degree of culpability. The principle in physics that every action gives rise to an equal and opposite reaction might be applied here. But perhaps the idea of the just penalty is a utopian dream. Although a perfect solution is unattainable, a reasonable solution must be sought, which means proceeding, as in mathematics, by successive approximations, setting the offence and its consequences against the sacrifice imposed on the perpetrator by the punishment inflicted. What, for instance, is the point of inflicting a penalty involving loss of civil rights on someone who has already brought his own name into disrepute?

Regrettably, prison continues to generate more ethical, social, psychological and economic problems than it solves. In practice, the rehabilitation desired by many systems of criminal law around the world ends in disillusionment, despair and revolt against a society that closes its doors to ex-convicts. The judicial system is still seeking ways to carry out

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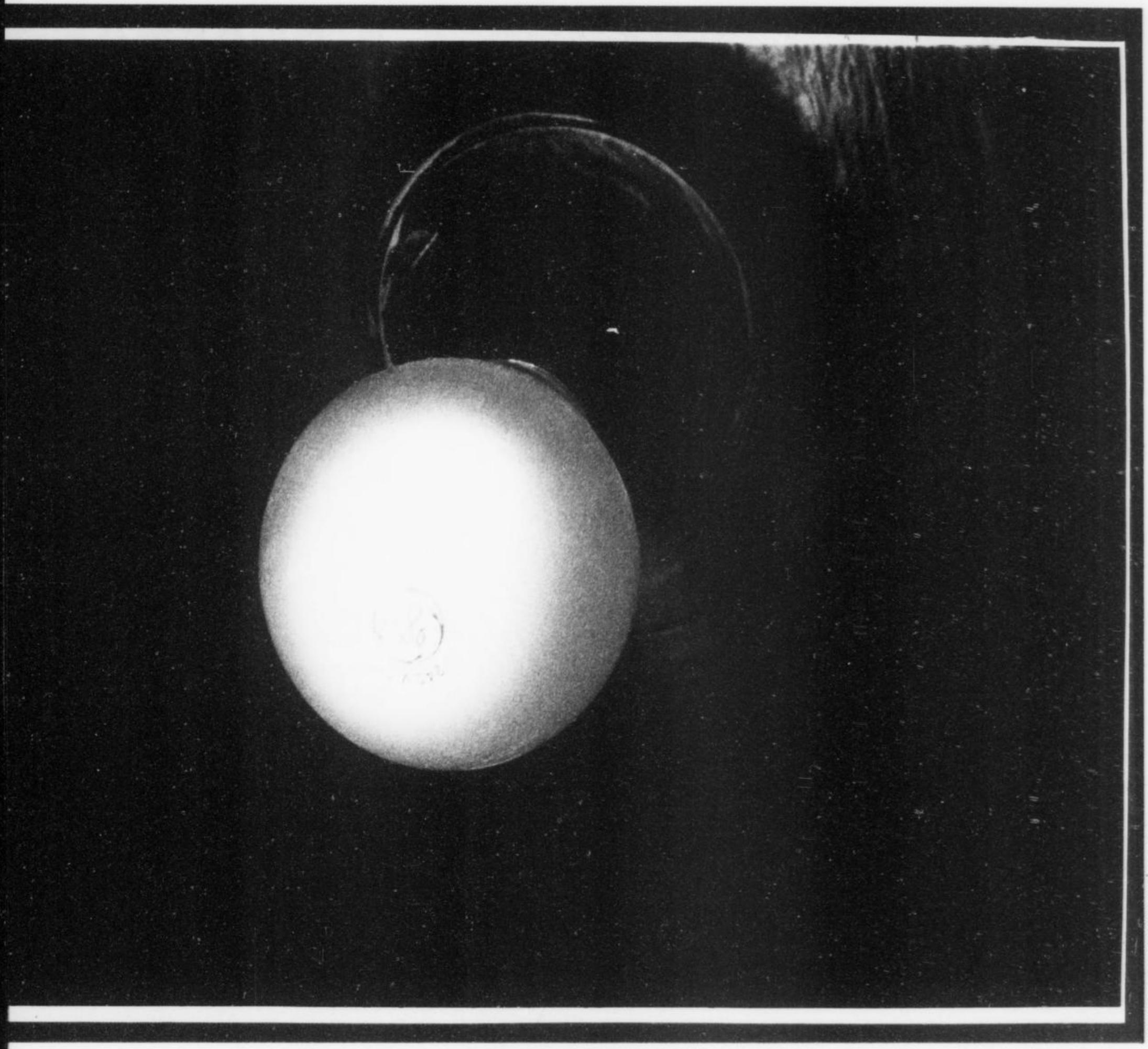
Visiting day at Gatesville women's prison, Texas (U.S.A.).



© Michael Inns/*Inside Eye*/Panos Pictures, London

The cell's naked light bulb. Photo taken by Michael Inns while he was an inmate at Wandsworth prison in London (see page 35).

penal sanctions that provide adequate responses to the need for the psychological rehabilitation of offenders and their reintegration into society.

There is an urgent need to find alternatives to custodial sentences, so that offenders—with the exception of those who pose a definite and continuing threat—can be re-educated for productive lives in society. Every penologist knows that most criminals retain some vestiges of morality, feel rejected and scorned, seek forgiveness from their families and the community for the offence they have committed and frequently acknowledge the validity of their punishment. They often turn themselves in, and remorse even leads some of them to take their own lives.

If the judicial system itself regards sentences as punitive measures, how can inmates faced with the soul-destroying experience of prison life hope that they can ever again be useful members of society? It is indispensable to improve and modernize penal and judicial systems so that sentences and their application can restore the inmate's dignity and prepare him or her for a constructive role in society. Imprisonment should be a last resort, for individuals who pose a clear threat to the community.

The problems facing prison systems cannot be solved in isolation, but must be considered in relation to social justice and to the law-enforcement and judicial systems and integrated into society as a whole. This requires the active participation of all sectors of society, ▸

▸ which must set aside their prejudices and shed their indifference.

Dealing with the problems of the prison system calls for an innovative approach to incarceration and the adoption of alternative measures that, while punishing the offence, are likely to re-educate the offender for responsible citizenship. ■

Should prison be abolished?

A recent penal reform movement has put forward the idea of abolishing prison, but although its underlying logic can be defended in theory, there seems no obvious way of putting the idea into effect in institutional terms, given the current state of society.

Abolitionists emphasize the penal system's selective nature and its limited operational capacity (prisons are filled with poor people). They argue that incarceration as a form of punishment has already been abolished for those they call "underground criminals"—lawbreakers who escape imprisonment because of their prestige, privilege or influence.

But blame for the impunity of "underground criminals" should be laid at the doorstep of the judicial rather than the penal system. What should be done is not abolish prisons or imprison all and sundry, but improve the efficiency of the criminal law. It would also be a good idea if, once a sentence is handed down, it could subsequently be adapted to take account of the offender's development during the rehabilitation process. ■ **E. O.**

© Trips/S. Grant/Ask Images, Paris

Statue of blind justice in an American library. She is holding a sword and scales, the symbols of truth and impartiality.

A prisoner's

After long years in gaol a man becomes a student and a writer

It is hard to talk about prison without losing your cool. And if you do, you risk getting caught up in a confrontation with the supporters or opponents of a system that, although ineffective, seems indispensable.

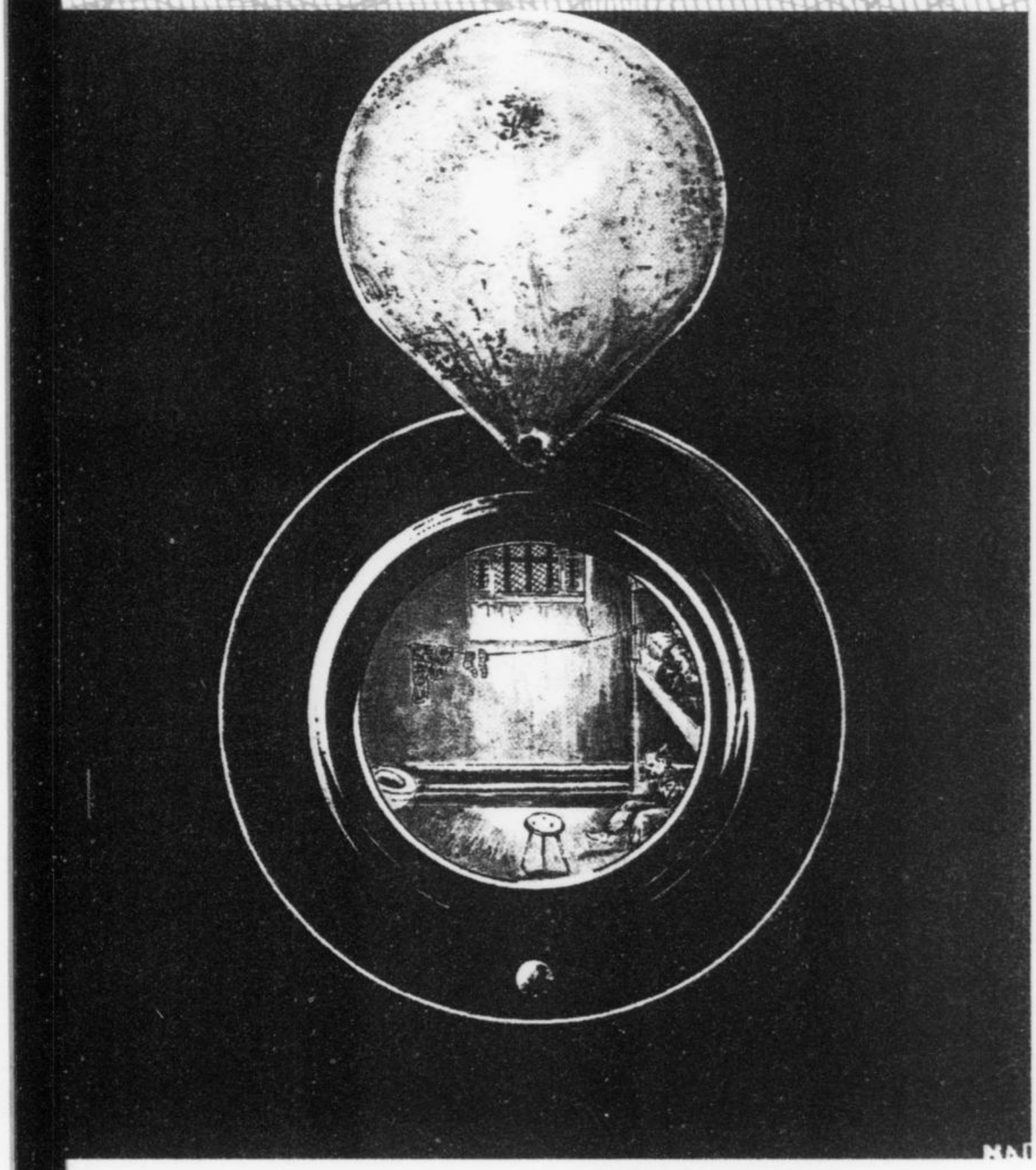
My reason for testifying publicly about areas of my life where the scars have still not healed is that I would like to help in the search for more satisfactory and more caring responses to the problems of delinquency.

I come from what is euphemistically known as a working-class background, in other words from the underclass. I was one of seven children, and we were so poor that none of us was able to stay on at school beyond the minimum leaving age. The prospect of working as a boiler-maker did not appeal to me at all—a wrong direction that in the circumstances it was difficult to correct. The mood of resignation that settled in after 1968 put paid to whatever illusions I still had about a better and fairer world. In January 1970 I was arrested, with some of my childhood buddies, for a hold-up committed with a dummy weapon.

Prison came as a brutal shock. The appalling physical conditions and to an even greater extent the prevailing outlook made me feel I had stepped back into an age of barbarity. The grim universe within the prison walls not only seemed out of touch with the outside world but to be embedded in a punitive mentality bordering on bestiality. I felt utterly isolated from the prison officers and my fellow inmates. I also felt cut off from myself, and this was not the least of the dangers I was up against. I soon learned what life in the jungle is all about. If you want to

testimony

BY LOUIS PEREGO



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Drawing of a peephole used by guards to look inside a cell (France).

survive you can't afford to trust another living soul.

You start by withdrawing into a shell. Then, if you don't crack up, you get tougher, carefully concealing your slightest weaknesses. You have to think twice about every move you make. A misplaced word or glance could lead to all sorts of trouble. The pressure was so intense that whatever vague feelings of remorse I might have had gave way to a strong sense of injustice. When you're always on your guard you suffer physical and psychological harm that is impossible to measure. After serving four-and-a-half years of a six-year sentence, I came out broken and bent on revenge.

I tried to settle down; I became the father of a little girl. But three years after my release I was imprisoned for armed robbery. The 1974 prison riots had led to a handful of vague reforms. Inmates were allowed to listen to the radio, and washbasins and toilets were installed in some (but not all) cells. But the mentality had not changed and arbitrary power still reigned supreme.

I found time to think about the way my life was going. A spell of solitary confinement for a breach of discipline gave me an opportunity to brush up on what I had learned in school and pursue my education. I wasn't allowed to attend the prison school, so I had to work on my own. This time I served eight years of a twelve-year sentence and was released with a Master's in psychology under my belt. I knew things would be tough, but I had no idea how tough.

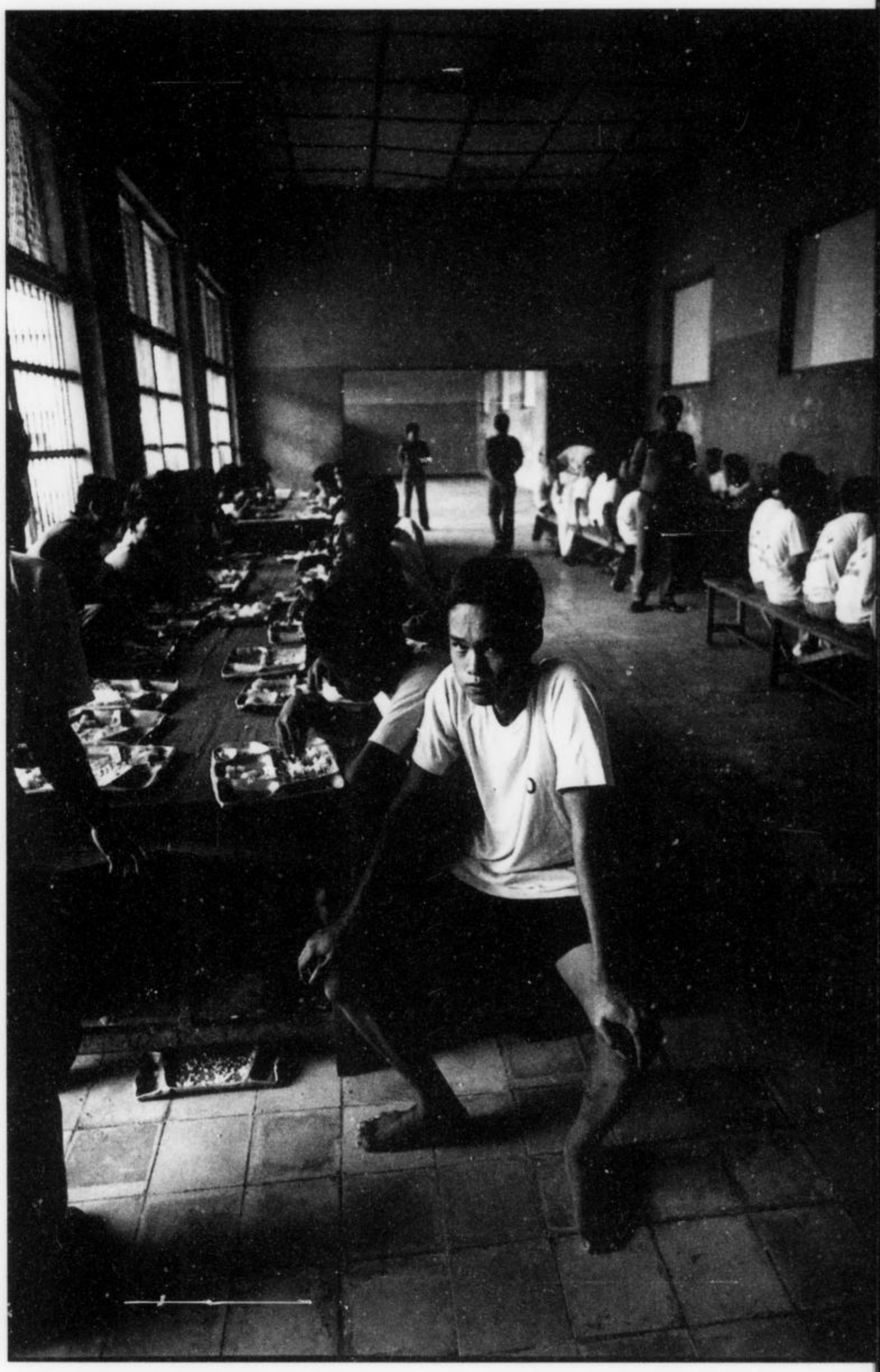
Reintegration is a term that should be added to the list of empty, meaningless words. Mysteriously, everyone I contacted with a view to a job shied away as if they had been tipped off about me. In July 1987, I committed another offence and was arrested again. I wondered for a long time whether life was worth living but loving support from my companion and our children helped me get back on my feet.

Writing my first book led to my conditional release after three and half years of preventive detention. But when I showed up for a court date eighteen months later, I was sentenced to twelve years imprisonment, in other words I had more than eight years to serve. I still do not know how I managed to survive that additional ordeal. Love and the confidence a few people showed in me had, of course, a lot to do with it. Which just goes to show, whatever some people may think, it's never too late to start again. But what a waste. Looking back, I can't help thinking it could have been avoided. ■

Waiting behind bars

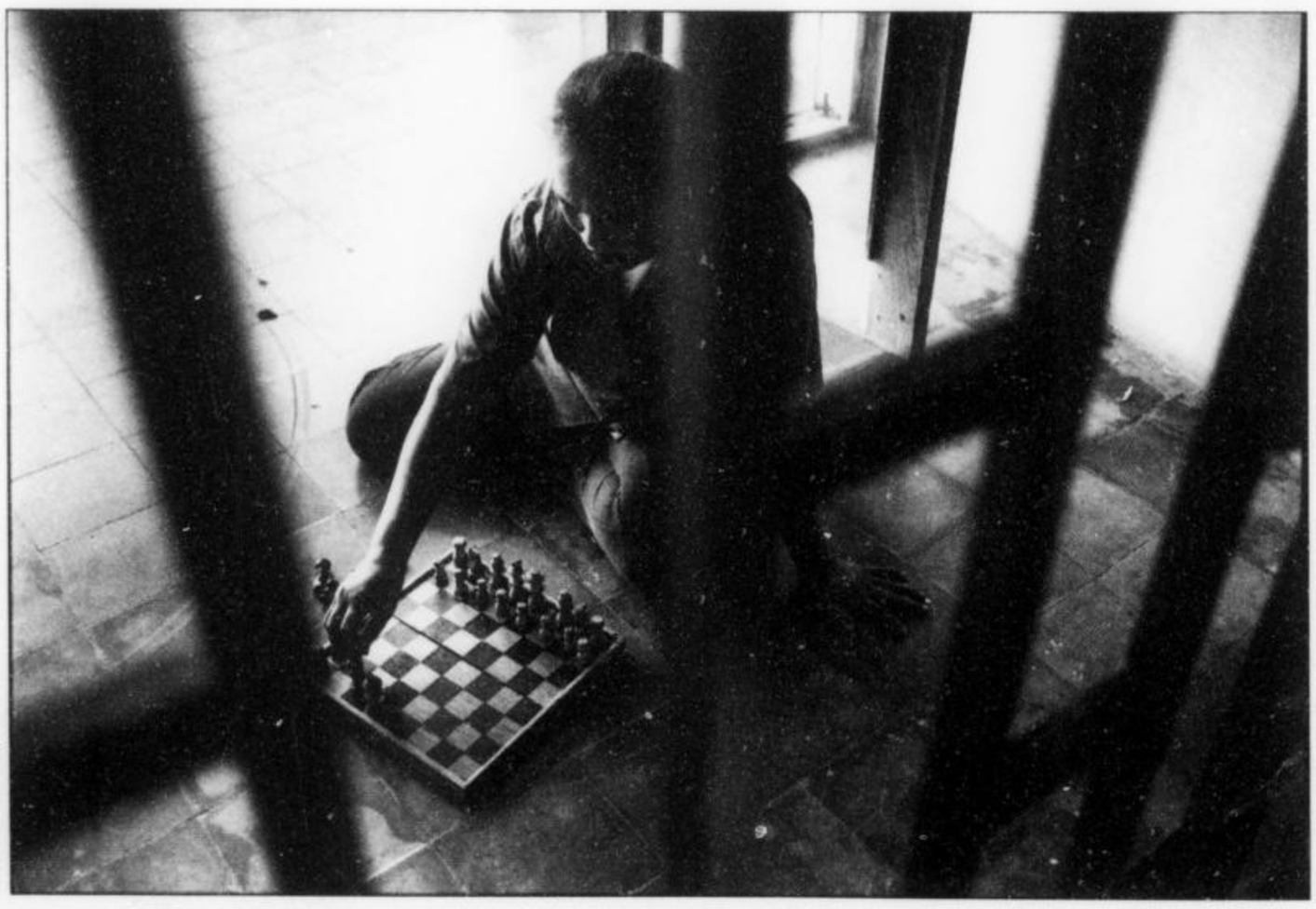
"Most of the young men with numbers on their white T-shirts are just waiting for the sound of the gong which means that another day has passed and there is one day less to count before they can go back to their families, where maybe a new brother or sister has arrived, see their friends who will have grown but not changed and live in a neighbourhood which will always produce victims who cannot obtain the quality of life produced by a society where money, Mercedes and beauty are the ingredients that count. As long as honesty and pride don't count in society young men will commit crimes which will put them behind bars and give them boundless hours of waiting."

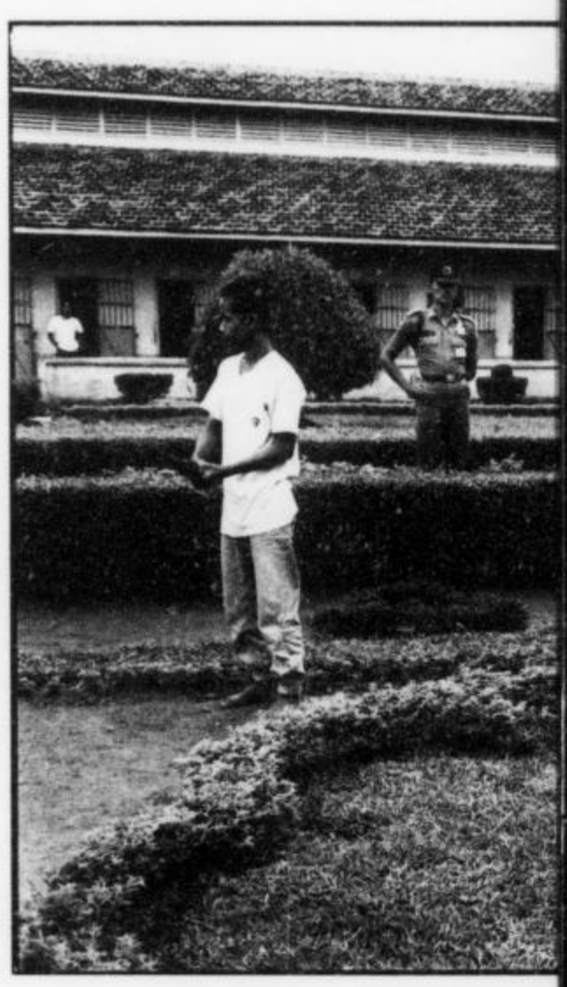
These lines by British photographer Tina Gue accompany her coverage of a prison for young men and a women's prison in Djakarta (Indonesia). On these pages, a selection of her photos.



The canteen

Chess game

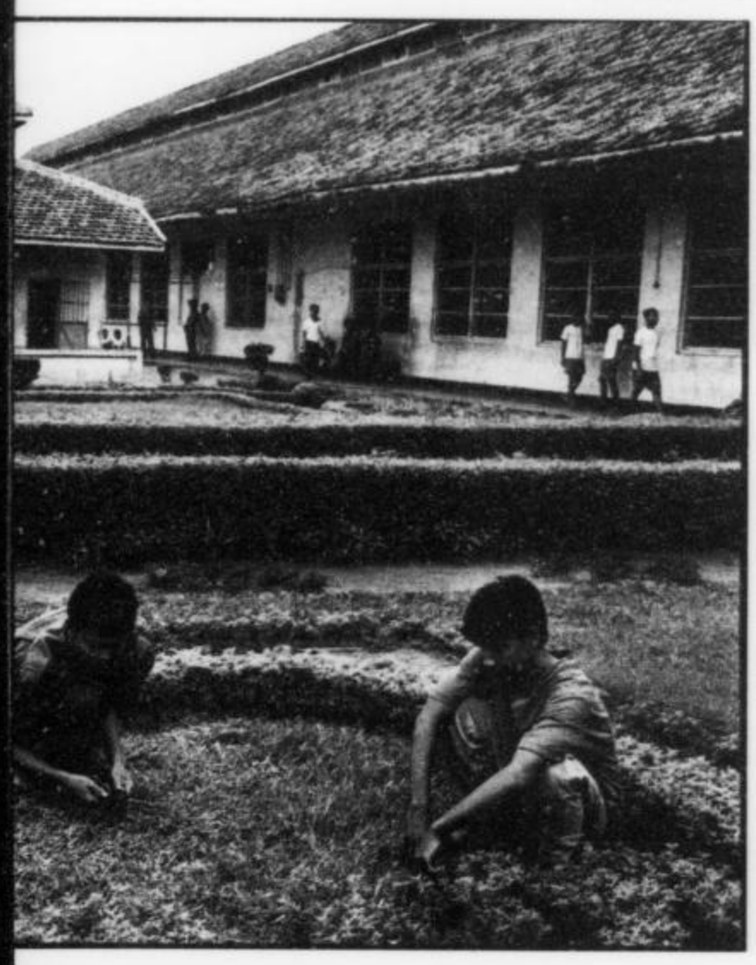




Photos © Tina Gue/Panos Pictures, London

Mealtime

Garden duty



The prison school

Alternatives to jail

BY JOSÉ LUIS DE LA CUESTA ARZAMENDI

The application of non-custodial sentences should be encouraged wherever possible

Two social rehabilitation programmes for young offenders in Los Angeles, California (U.S.A.). Above, working in a school for severely handicapped children. Above right, a poetry reading with senior citizens.

Despite efforts to improve the quality of inmates' lives, in most countries prison is still by and large a place of exclusion and segregation, synonymous with injustice and pointless suffering. The steadily rising prison population is straining the system's capacity to breaking point and hindering the application of more ambitious penal policies that look further than the immediate problems of imprisonment and overcrowding. Security requirements are so pressing in overcrowded prisons that the authorities do little to create effective rehabilitation and social reintegration programmes (although such programmes do exist). Add drug abuse in prison and its associated problems—Aids being the most serious—and the control of prison gangs over inmates, and the picture looks grim indeed.

The prison system's difficulties in achieving objectives such as rehabilitation and social reintegration are not exactly new. Deprivation of freedom, which was institutionalized in the European judicial system during the late eighteenth century, was intended as a more rational and humane response to criminal acts than the punishments that had previously been meted out. But its framework of application—prison—soon proved incapable of solving the individual and social conflicts that crime brings about or reveals. Since then, prison as an institution has always been in crisis. Its legitimacy has been called into question, and penologists have sought new ways of improving the situation and, at the same time, ▶

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Gruvberget, below, is a former lumberjacks' village north of Stockholm where inmates can spend a few days' vacation with their families. It was purchased by the Swedish prison service in 1971.

© Setboun/Rapho, Paris

© Setboun/Rapho, Paris

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Top, young offenders at a "fire camp" in Los Angeles, where they train alongside professional firefighters.

Above, physical training at Harris County boot camp near Houston, Texas (U.S.A.).

looked for alternative solutions. This trend has been gathering momentum since the second half of the nineteenth century.

A wide variety of alternatives to custodial sentences are currently in use in many penal systems. The most noteworthy include:

Attenuated execution of sentences, including detention at home, semi-liberty, freedom on licence, and various forms of discontinuous detention (e.g. during leisure time and/or at weekends);

Probation, which ranges from a suspended sentence to conditional remission of a sentence and a broad gamut of probationary and conditional release measures;

Alternatives to custodial sentences that benefit the offender as much as society. In addition to fining, as traditionally used in penal codes, many other alternatives now exist, including accessory penalties or penalties that restrict freedom or impose a ban on professional activities, the deprivation or suspension of certain rights and payment of damages to the victim by the offender.

Community service as an alternative to prison has been highly successful in many European countries.[1] Introduced for petty delinquents in the United Kingdom in 1972, this penalty deprives offenders of their free time but should not prevent them from fulfilling their normal professional commitments. Convicted offenders are required to do between 40 and 240 hours of unpaid, socially useful work over a period of one year to eighteen months. Community service is performed for charitable, humanitarian associations and could include such tasks as helping the sick or collecting blood or organs.

Community service is not applicable in every case. It is primarily suitable for teenagers and young adults who, though they have committed minor offences, have not had their sentences conditionally suspended. To become common practice, this type of penalty requires the creation of an assistance and supervisory service as well as sufficient numbers of community service jobs.

The search for alternatives to incarceration is no remedy for the prison system's shortcomings. The prison population includes many individuals who have not been sentenced, but who are being held for questioning or have been remanded in custody by a court decision and are awaiting trial. In many countries, they account for up to 50 per cent of the total number of inmates.

Theoretically, these prisoners benefit from the presumption of innocence, but their experience of prison life is not really different from that of convicted offenders. Methods other than incarceration must be found to ensure that they show up for trial. Some already exist, such as mandatory rules of conduct, surrender of certain documents, and bail. Judges should encourage these practices as alternatives to prison. ■

1 Community service as a main or alternative sentence is applied in European countries including Austria (for minors), Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland.

Invisible chains

BY LINDA JOHANSSON

Sweden's electronic tagging project

Imprisonment is the most expensive form of punishment in modern society. In Sweden, the upkeep of an inmate in an open prison costs approximately 1,500 kroner ($200 or £120) a day, and around 2,000 kroner ($250 or £160) in a closed prison. Studies have shown that incarceration has a negative impact on detainees, who are forced to leave their families, jobs and social life, and that prisons are breeding grounds for criminality where young inmates learn about crime from more experienced lawbreakers.

To address these issues, Sweden launched a pilot project in 1994 in which minor offenders can choose to be put under electronic surveillance instead of going to prison. In six probation districts, lawbreakers sentenced to prison terms of two months or less were given the option of living at home and wearing an electronic ankle bracelet. Results surpassed expectations and three years later the programme was expanded to include all offenders nationwide sentenced to terms of three months or less. Nearly half the 4,000 people ▸

Electronic tagging is still only practised in a few countries, including Sweden and the United States. Above, an electronic bracelet strapped to a young offender's ankle in Tucson, Arizona (U.S.A.).

© Patrick Bard/Editing, Paris

▸ eligible for electronic tagging in the first six months of 1997 had been convicted of drunken driving.

Offenders must meet several requirements to be eligible for the programme. They must have a recognized home, a phone and a job. In addition, they must pay 50 kroner ($6 or £4) a day for the duration of their sentence to Victim Support, a charitable organization. A 1997 study showed that several offenders who did not request the bracelet said the reason was they could not afford the 50 kroner a day or had neither a job nor a home.

Probation officers do all they can to assist applicants, including trying to find them jobs and slots in training programmes. A temporary phone line paid for by the national prisons and probation administration can be installed and offenders are encouraged to ask relatives or friends to help them find housing. Those who cannot afford the 50 kroner a day are exempted from payment.

The tag is fastened around the offender's ankle. A 50-centimetre high electronic transmitter installed at his or her home beams signals to a surveillance centre. If the tag is removed or the offender leaves home, the transmitter immediately triggers an alarm and the centre rings up the offender's home to check for a possible malfunction. If the offender is found to have broken the rules, the tag is withdrawn and the rest of the sentence must be served in prison. But that seldom happens. The study showed that permission to work was suspended for misconduct in only 5 per cent of cases, usually because the offender had been drinking alcohol. Infractions were most common among offenders serving longer sentences.

Tight restrictions on movement

A probation officer draws up a tight schedule that must be rigorously followed. Freedom of movement is strictly limited. Offenders are only allowed to leave home during working hours, except for one hour each Saturday and Sunday. If they are more than ten minutes off schedule, the alarm is set off.

Most of the people who have been electronically tagged say that it's at least as distressing as being in a prison where there is greater freedom of movement. In addition to restrictions on leaving home, total abstinence from the consumption of drugs and alcohol is required. Probation officers make surprise visits at all hours of the day or night, and at these times offenders have to take an alcohol breath test.

"If I didn't have a family," said Jan-Erik Bengtsson, after wearing his tag for a very long week, "I would rather have stayed in jail. I can't even take out the garbage and I feel like I'm always being watched. The breath tests are very demeaning. You don't feel trusted and it's very unpleasant not knowing when the probation officer will show up." But like most people who wear a tag, Mr. Bengtsson still thinks it has some advantages. He can work and continue living at home with his companion and their three children.

Electronic tagging has resulted in much heavier workloads for probation officers, many of whom say they no longer have enough time for their regular duties and believe that prison staff should be responsible for keeping tabs on tagged offenders. They consider themselves overqualified for such tasks—most of them are sociologists with several years of higher education behind them.

But electronic tagging also results in savings. The upkeep cost per offender is approximately 450 kroner a day, two-thirds less than the cost of imprisonment, and several correctional facilities have closed down for lack of inmates. The next step will probably be to include in the programme offenders sentenced to terms of up to four months. The possibility has been raised of extending eligibility to lawbreakers sentenced to up to eleven months, but the authorities prefer to act cautiously so as not to jeopardize the potential of this alternative to imprisonment. ■

Eighteenth-century convicts employed on public works in Bern (Switzerland). Period engraving.

© Jean-Loup Charmet, Paris

From revenge to reparation

BY TONY PETERS

Penal policy takes a new direction by confronting offenders with the consequences of their acts and giving them a chance to make amends

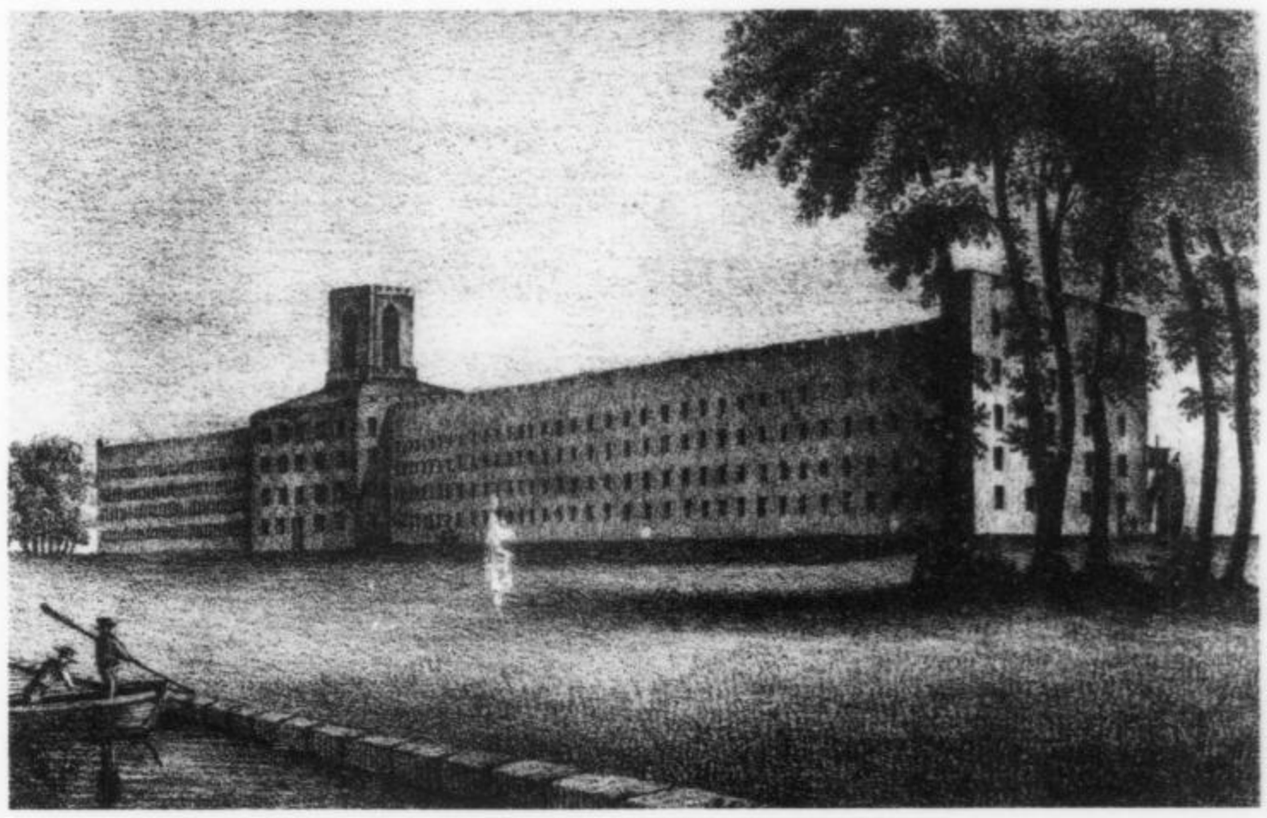
Over the past few decades, more attention has been focused on the victims of crime than on criminals. This raises two questions. How far do legal systems take into account victims' demands for justice in the sentences they mete out to offenders? And to what extent do sentences respond to those demands?

Eighteenth-century theories of law and justice developed by the Enlightenment philosophers in Europe form the basis of what is now regarded as classical penal procedure, whose non-arbitrary character is quite different from the procedure that prevailed before the French Revolution. Many forms of corporal punishment disappeared and were replaced by simple, clear-cut punishments like fines and prison sentences.

In the nineteenth century, the purpose of prison sentences was to make criminals pay their debt to society. Incarceration temporarily kept offenders out of the way while serving as an example and a warning. Imprisonment was also supposed to give offenders time to reflect on their misdeeds.

With the citizen's safety uppermost in mind, classical penologists emphasized a strictly legal definition of crime and punishment. However, as a result of the growing influence of the behavioural sciences views of delinquency changed and the idea that a single sentence is appropriate for all offenders regardless of the crime committed came under attack. A new trend emerged whereby sentencing was required to take each offender's circumstances ▸

Blackwell's Island penitentiary in New York City (U.S.A.) in the 19th century. Period engraving.



© Jean-Loup Charmet, Paris

▸ and personal history into account. Sentencing criteria were no longer based on the legal definition of the crime but on the threat to society posed by the offender. A battery of alternatives to fit specific individuals and situations were developed from the late nineteenth century onwards, including prison terms for hardened criminals, suspended sentences and probation for occasional offenders and protective and rehabilitation systems for young delinquents. Sentences were seen as a useful means of reintegrating the criminal into society.

Crowded prisons

After the Second World War and the 1948 Declaration of Human Rights, new alternatives to prison opened up prospects of more humane sentencing with a view to reintegrating offenders into society. But these hopes came to nothing and alternative sentences remained by and large marginal. Imprisonment did not become a solution of last resort.

In the 1970s, the flagrant inhumanity of correctional facilities, the psychological impact of incarceration and the social exclusion resulting from this form of punishment resulted in a growing scepticism about the prison system's capacity to rehabilitate inmates. In many facilities they also led to strikes, revolts and uprisings, which were sometimes violently put down.

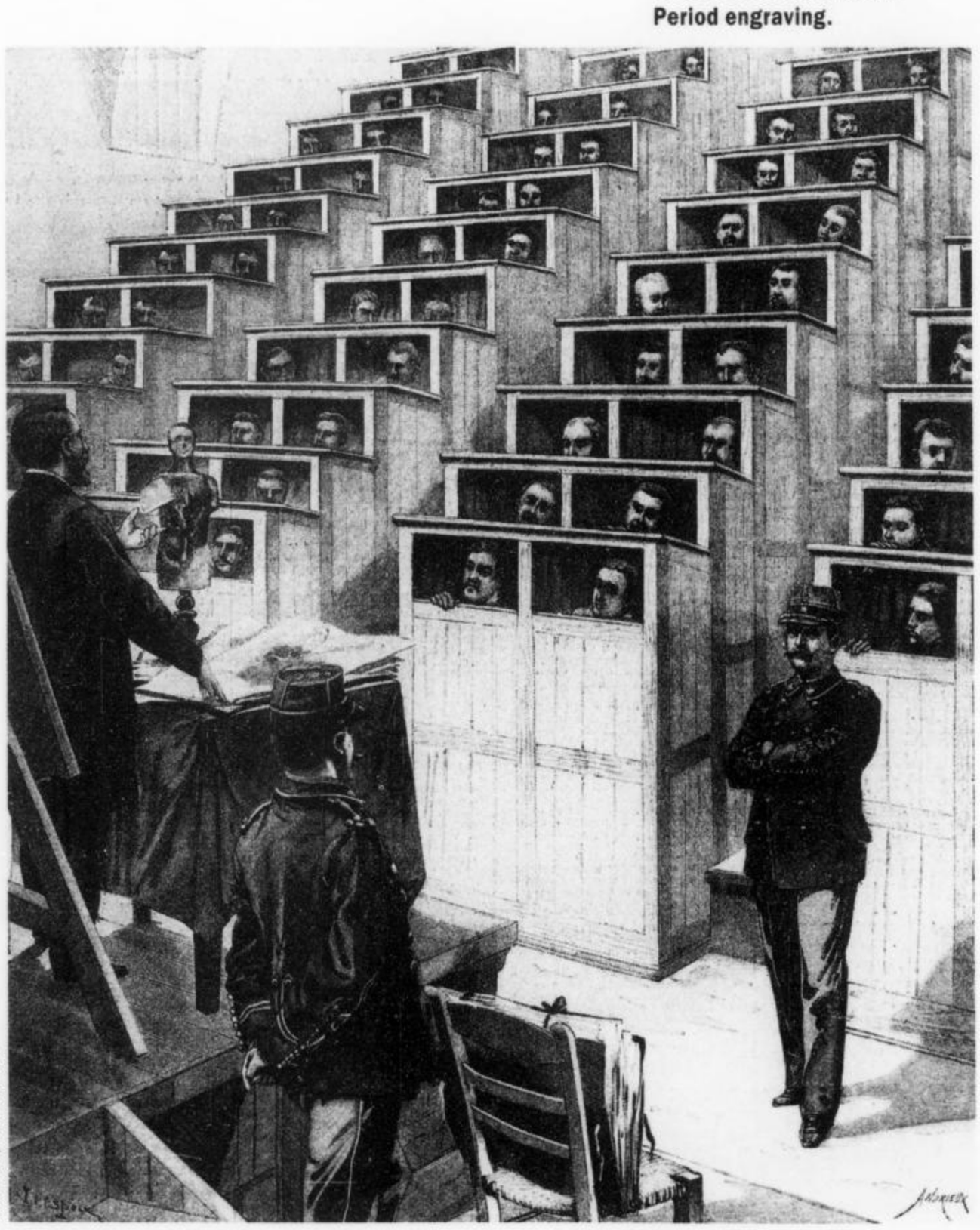
© Paulo Amorim, Brazil

Inmates in Brazil protesting against poor prison conditions and the slowness of the judicial system.

Since the 1980s, two opposing viewpoints have emerged. On the one hand, prison seems to have lost its legitimacy as a punitive institution. On the other, some organizations insist that inmates serve out their full sentences, thereby restoring the punitive function of imprisonment. At the same time, those who remain unconvinced of the socializing virtues of deprivation of freedom stress that, in a democratic state under the rule of law, inmates are citizens entitled to legal protection and basic human rights.

Over the past ten years, crowded prison conditions have overshadowed ideological discussions about the appropriateness, usefulness and humaneness of incarceration. The average length of sentences has increased and procedures for early release have become more complicated. Keeping the offender off the streets seems to have become the main purpose of imprisonment.

A turn-of-the-century lecture against alcoholism at Fresnes prison (France). Period engraving.



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The debate on sentencing

One major innovation that has emerged over the past two decades is the idea of reparation. Recent studies of the victims of crime have strongly influenced the debate on sentencing. The question of how far sentences solve the problems of victims is increasingly being asked. In this context, the definition of criminality and the penal approach to it become part of a horizontal exchange relationship between

© D. Mandritch/Sygma, Paris

Fighting a fire started during a riot at Dijon prison (France).

offenders and victims. Both are equally concerned in the solution that is found for the problem posed by a criminal offence.

Numerous offender-victim conciliation projects show that this is in many cases a realistic approach and, what is more, highly satisfactory for both parties and effective in changing the offender's behaviour. Conciliation plays a major role in helping to build a criminal justice system in which offenders make some amends to their victims.

In handing out prison terms, little attention was given to the victim. An intelligent execution of the sentence should take into consideration how the offender and victim experienced the crime. The systematic denial of the meaning and consequences of the offence and its acceptance or rejection by victims and offenders strongly dehumanizes the application of the sentence. Confronting offenders with the consequences of their deeds and giving them an opportunity to make amends should become a basic function and priority of the criminal justice system in the very near future. In a society where attention is now focused on the victim, sentencing which does not require offenders to make amends to their victims lacks credibility and meaning. ■

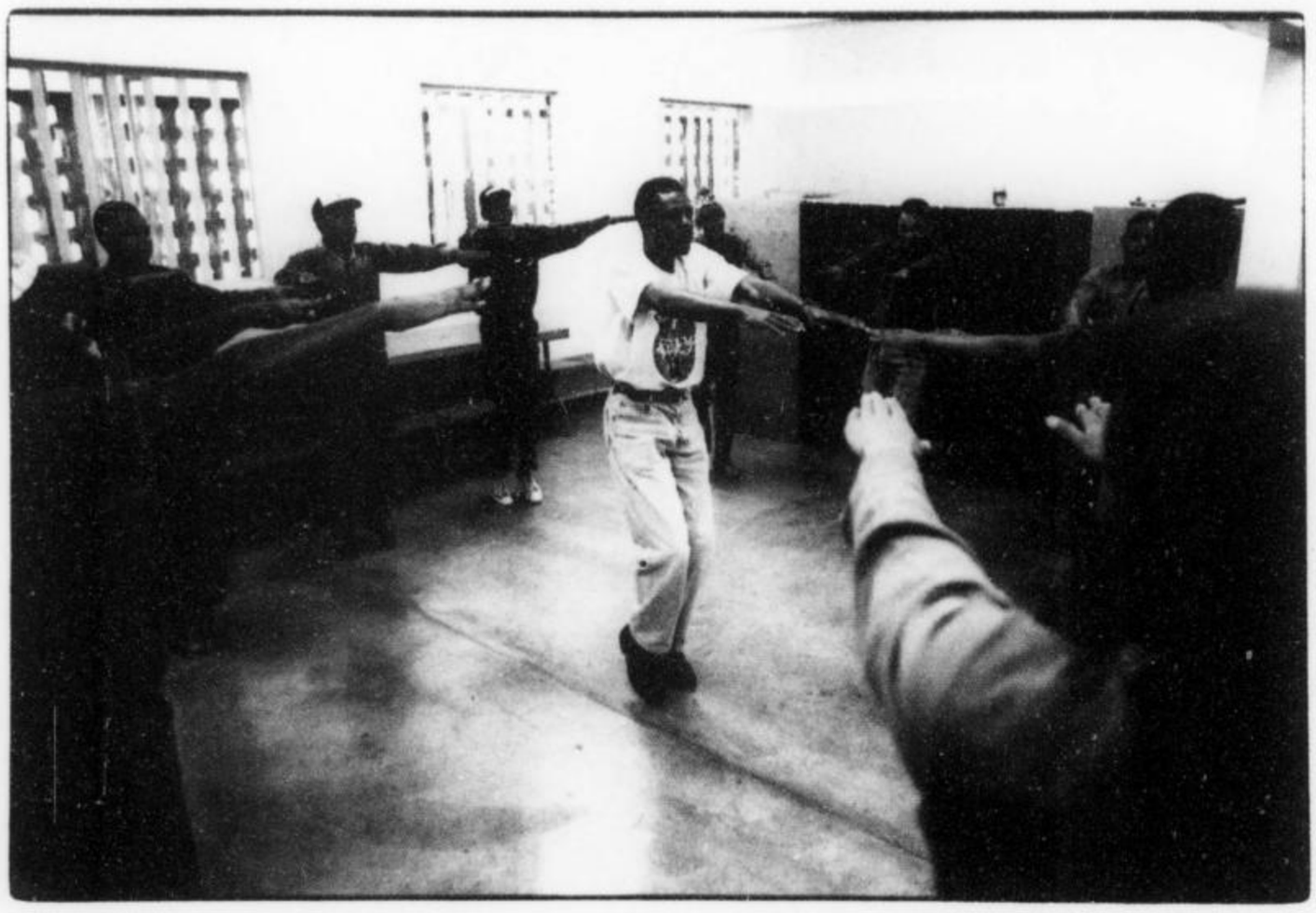
Photos © Gisèle Wulfsohn/Panos Pictures, London

Rehearsing a scene depicting "the boss" and his slave.

South Africa: puppets in prison

"Why use puppets to educate prisoners about Aids? The puppet is a visual metaphor, representing 'real life' and at the same time one step removed from the real world. Puppets can be highly controversial and thus often 'say more' than live actors. Especially when tackling taboo subjects like sex and death, they can be less embarrassing to the audience. Puppetry can be used to break down racial and social barriers. and can reach all audiences, including the illiterate. Combining them with humour and music is entertaining, holds up a mirror to

Puppeteer Nyanga Tshabalala (centre) during a warm-up exercise with inmates.



Puppeteer Gary Friedman with a puppet head created by inmates.

Inmates carving puppet heads.

society and enables people to look—and laugh—at themselves."

In 1987 Gary Friedman and Nyanga Tshabalala founded Puppets Against Aids, a non-governmental organization that raises awareness of the disease. In 1996 they held a six-week pilot workshop, Puppets in Prison, with a group of young prisoners in Diepkopf prison in Johannesburg (South Africa). Participants developed performances whose scenarios included rape, sexual practices, drugs, human rights, prostitution and the correct use of condoms. A documentary video about the project was made and televised in several countries. This creative, informative experience had a constructive effect on inmates. Photos on these pages were taken by Gisèle Wulfsohn at Diepkopf during the workshop.

A scene from one of the puppet shows.

Prisons for profit

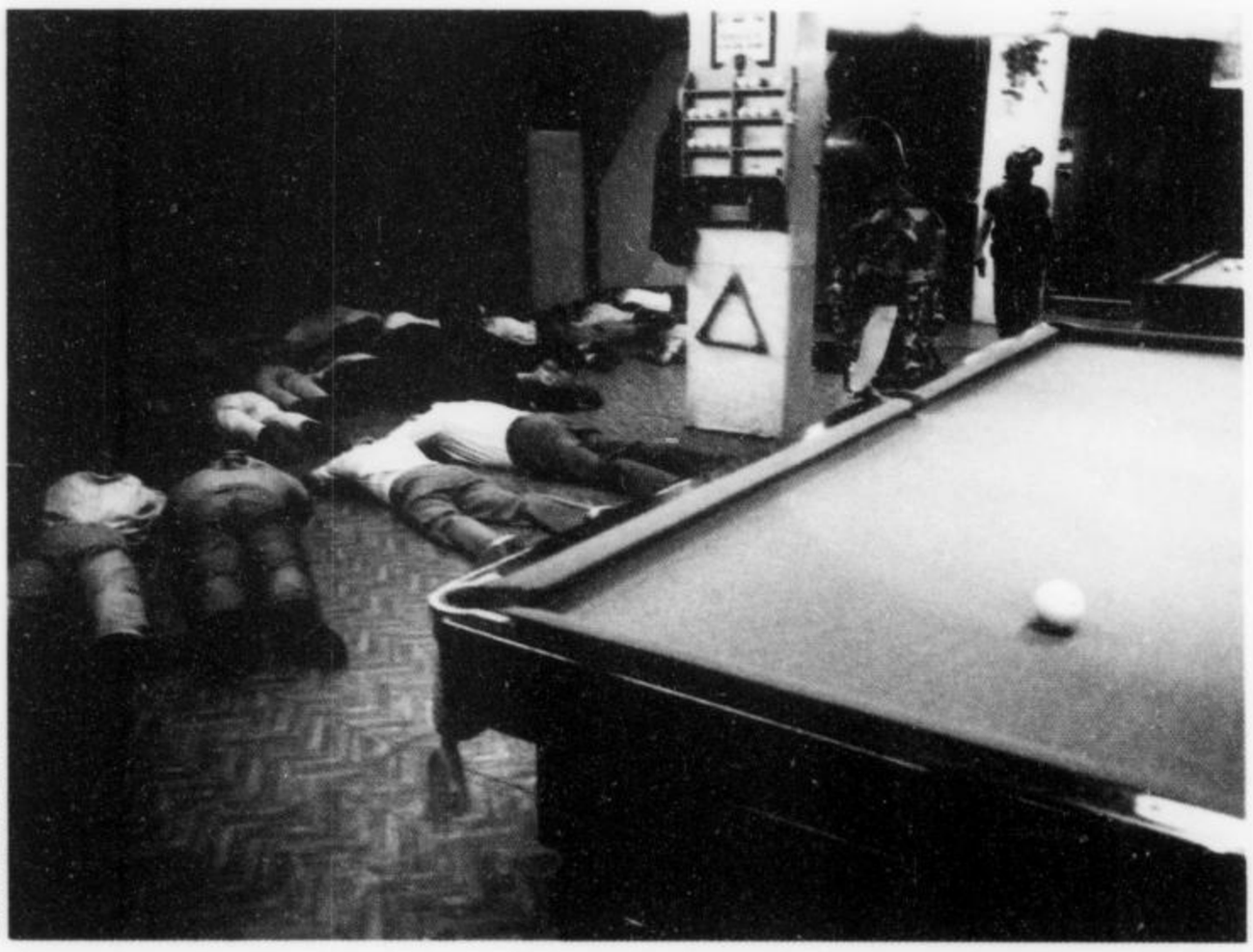
BY LEONARD L. CAVISE

In the modern era, it has only been since the 1980s that private, for-profit corporations have sought to operate entire prison systems[1]. The private sector has long been involved in running various components of prison systems such as catering, industries, juvenile offender facilities or community-based programmes. Only recently, however, have governmental entities, mostly in the United States and Europe, considered turning over the entire management and operation of a state's or locality's correctional system to private contractors.

The concept of prison privatization has given rise to wide debate. Its proponents argue that private contractors can build larger prisons faster and thus accommodate a prison population that is, generally speaking, on the increase. They also argue that the private sector is not encumbered by bureaucracy, which is usually seen as a major impediment to the efficient operation of a state system. Corporations tend to be more streamlined and more willing to be flexible to meet expanding needs.

Opponents of prison privatization argue that crime is not a private matter between the offender and his or her gaolers, but an issue that concerns society as a whole. If the interests of society and the rights of the individual are to be safeguarded, the "government of the people" is under an obligation to ensure that the goals of incarceration are met by the constant control and monitoring exercised by a state agency that is not motivated by profit but by societal and individual concerns.

A police raid on a Moscow pool hall breaks up a brawl between rival gangs.



© Anthony Suau/Vu, Paris

Cheap labour

The modern prison system came into being during the period of rapid industrialization in the Western world in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Prison labour was regarded by private entrepreneurs as a potentially lucrative resource. It was cheap, and the capitalist did not have overall responsibility for the welfare of the prison worker. As a result, prison workshops were equipped, and the prisoners trained, by the enterprise concerned. The entrepreneur profited from the discounted labour, while the prison itself often made a financial gain by entering into a joint arrangement with the private contractors. Abuses were, however, common. In France, inmates' living and working conditions were deplorable and were seldom monitored by state officials. In Germany, many contractors supplied only minimal quantities of the cheapest food. In the United States, corrupt prison adminstrators often entered into agreements whereby the prisoners would be paid nothing at all for their labour.

The state retained overall responsibility for the incarceration and rehabilitation of the prisoner, for dispensing punishment was seen as too important a government function to be ceded to private entities. As recently as 1986, the American Bar Association took a position against privatization, on the principle that incarceration is an inherent function of government. If the private sector is allowed to control the terms and, to some degree, the length of incarceration, the argument goes, the state will have abdicated one of its principal moral duties.

Privatization: for and against

Proponents of privatization counter by saying that the government should retain monitoring and supervisory authority over prisons. The courts should, for example, review all prison decisions to grant or refuse parole, grant or refuse remission for good behaviour, or restrict or grant rights which might implicate the Constitution or other legislation. The total

© Melanie Carr/Ask Images, Paris

The gavel, symbol of the judge's authority (U.S.A.).

The private sector runs an increasing number of correctional facilities in Europe and the United States—a trend which is giving rise to controversy

delegation of all powers to the private sector would compromise the sovereignty of the state. On the other hand, to require that the government actually staff and operate the prison is too great a concession to symbolism.

We are, at the present time, witnessing a shrinkage in the role of government. Government programmes and regulatory powers are facing budget cuts or, in more and more cases, elimination, particularly in the social sector. At the same time, community-based correctional programmes are being scaled back, while the prison population of most countries is increasing dramatically. The humanitarian and reform-minded approaches to incarceration exert less and less influence while, with criminality increasing worldwide, the retributive and incapacitation models of punishment are on the increase. The issue in the privatization debate thus becomes, not whether the private sector can duplicate the social and rehabilitative goals of the prison system, but whether it can ▸

▸ house prisoners and dispense punishment as efficiently as the state. If so, the role of government will again be minimized and the stereotype of government-run agencies as inept and generally inferior will be perpetuated.

Mixed results

Opponents argue that the government still plays an essential role in many spheres, including the criminal justice system, public health, the environment, social security, and welfare. With private control, there is a danger that prisoners, traditionally among society's most neglected members, will suffer abuse and exploitation for profit. There are concerns about the development of a "criminal justice industrial complex" which could become a political force that would affect incarceration rates, length of term, and conditions of confinement based not upon societal interest but the profit motive.

On the level of legality, the issue is whether private control constitutes an acceptable delegation of the discipline- or rule-making authority. The private controller can hardly be considered a neutral rule-maker inasmuch as the expectation of profit will usually be the dominant rationale for any given rule. A compromise might be to have a state authority review disciplinary decisions by the prison for compliance with the governing legislation or constitution. In that way, the government would be relieved of the actual running of the system, while retaining overall responsibility (and liability) for it.

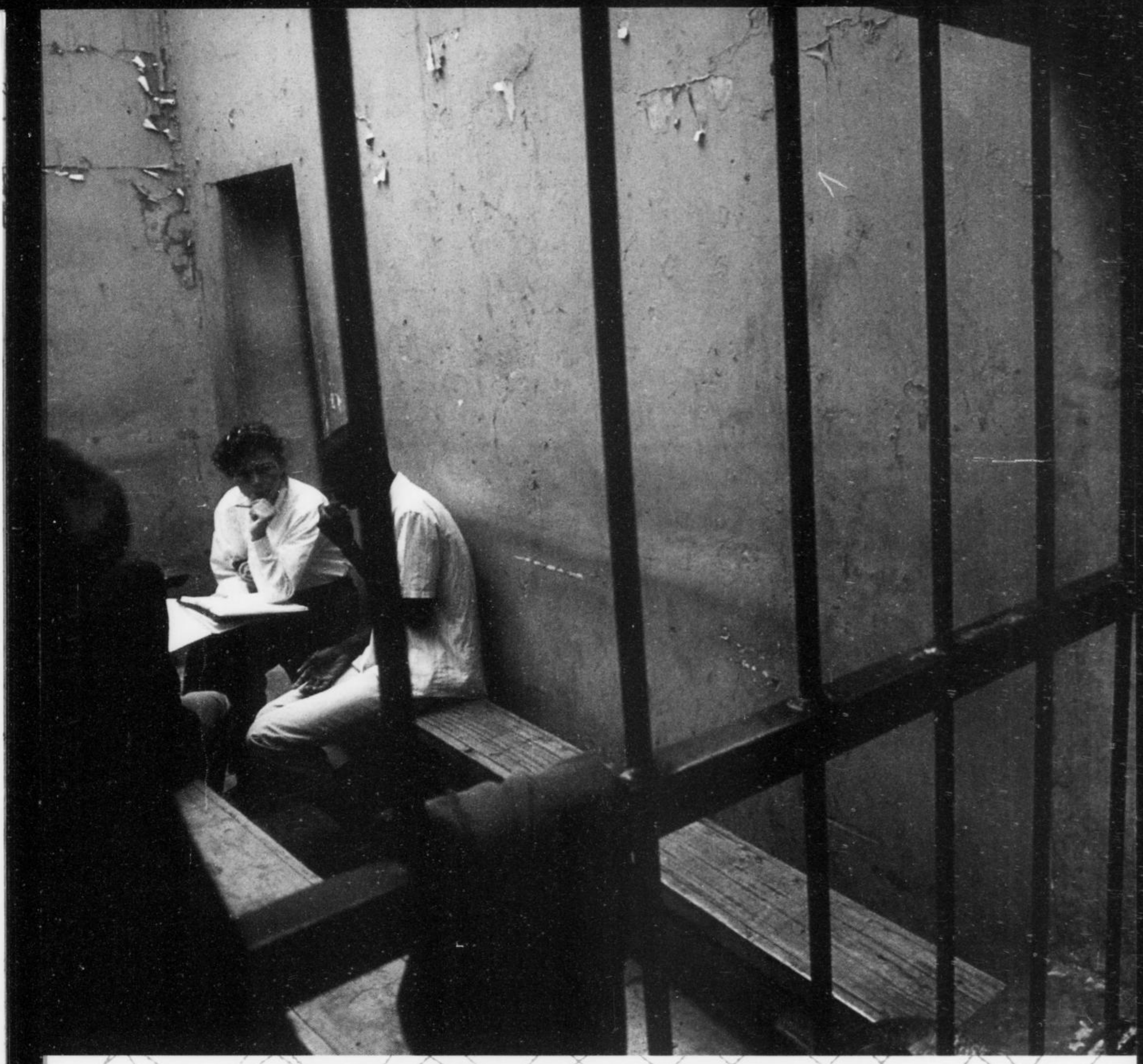
As the debate continues, many countries are going ahead with privatization projects. In 1994 alone, the number of privately-operated facilities increased by more than 20 per cent. The number of inmates in these facilities is now more than 30,000 in the United States alone. Although the largest of these projects is in the United States, other countries such as France, Australia and the United Kingdom have opened privately-controlled prisons. While the physical facilities generally seem to be of higher quality, the results as regards the quality of food, educational programmes, and, more generally, the opportunity for inmates to engage in meaningful pursuits are mixed. The private companies tend to make excellent profits, and all the estimates indicate that the future for prison privatization is, in economic terms, bright; but whether privatization will improve the social goals of prison remains to be seen. ■

1. *Many prisons in Europe were privately operated in the Middle Ages and as recently as the nineteenth century.* Author's note.

Right, a representative of a humanitarian organization visits a Rwandan prison in 1994.
© J. Langeirn/Sygma, Paris

Food service was one of the first prison functions contracted out to the private sector. Below, meal trays at the Chateaudun detention centre (France).

© Bernard Bisson/Sygma



Offenders' rights

BY MONIKA PLATEK

The defence of prisoners' rights is the foundation of democratic penal policy

Incarcerated persons are still commonly viewed simply as prisoners, and the deprivation of their freedom as merely the prelude to a series of other ordeals. However, the quite different idea that imprisonment is harsh enough retribution in itself is slowly and spasmodically gaining ground in the law and public opinion. This shift in attitude is due to the impact on national legislation of international regulations covering the rights of minors and adults subject to detention or imprisonment, the spread of democracy in many countries and, especially, the growing acceptance of the concept of human rights. ▶

The word "rights" can be used only when clear procedures allowing their enjoyment exist and unbiased, public and competent bodies—in most countries, the courts—guarantee their proper application.

The general state of a country's prison system is a yardstick of its level of civilization. Acknowledging that prisoners are still members of society, allowing them to keep most of the rights enjoyed by free citizens and granting them rights specific to their incarcerated status are expressions of basic tenets of humanitarianism and social solidarity. Because this approach defends human dignity, it helps to prevent crime and improve public safety. Low self-esteem or lack of self-respect often lead a person to be indifferent to the rights or dignity of others, and constitute one cause of deviant and criminal behaviour. The idea of *prisoners' rights* is the basic premise of any penal policy claiming to be rational, preventive and concerned with public safety and citizens' quality of life.

The large number of international regulations, resolutions and conventions regarding prisoners' rights shows how central this issue is and also how far the actual situation and legal status of prisoners still fall short of theoretical international standards. In spite of many efforts to curb, if not end, torture, physical abuse and humiliating treatment, the reality inside prison walls remains grim. Only international acceptance of prisoners' rights and their recognition on the local level can bring to prison systems the real accountability which is the essential safeguard of respect for prisoners' dignity.

Some prisoners have been detained because they have committed acts of cruelty, others merely because of their opinions, background, nationality, religion or even skin colour. Among them are children, young persons, the elderly and people with serious illnesses. Others are paying with their freedom for miscarriages of justice and other people's thirst for power and political ambitions. These inmates come from many walks of life. But a closer look at the prison population as a whole

Above, life goes on. Inmates and their children in Matroska Tishino women's prison in Moscow (Russia).

Opposite page, family visit at a Hungarian prison for men.

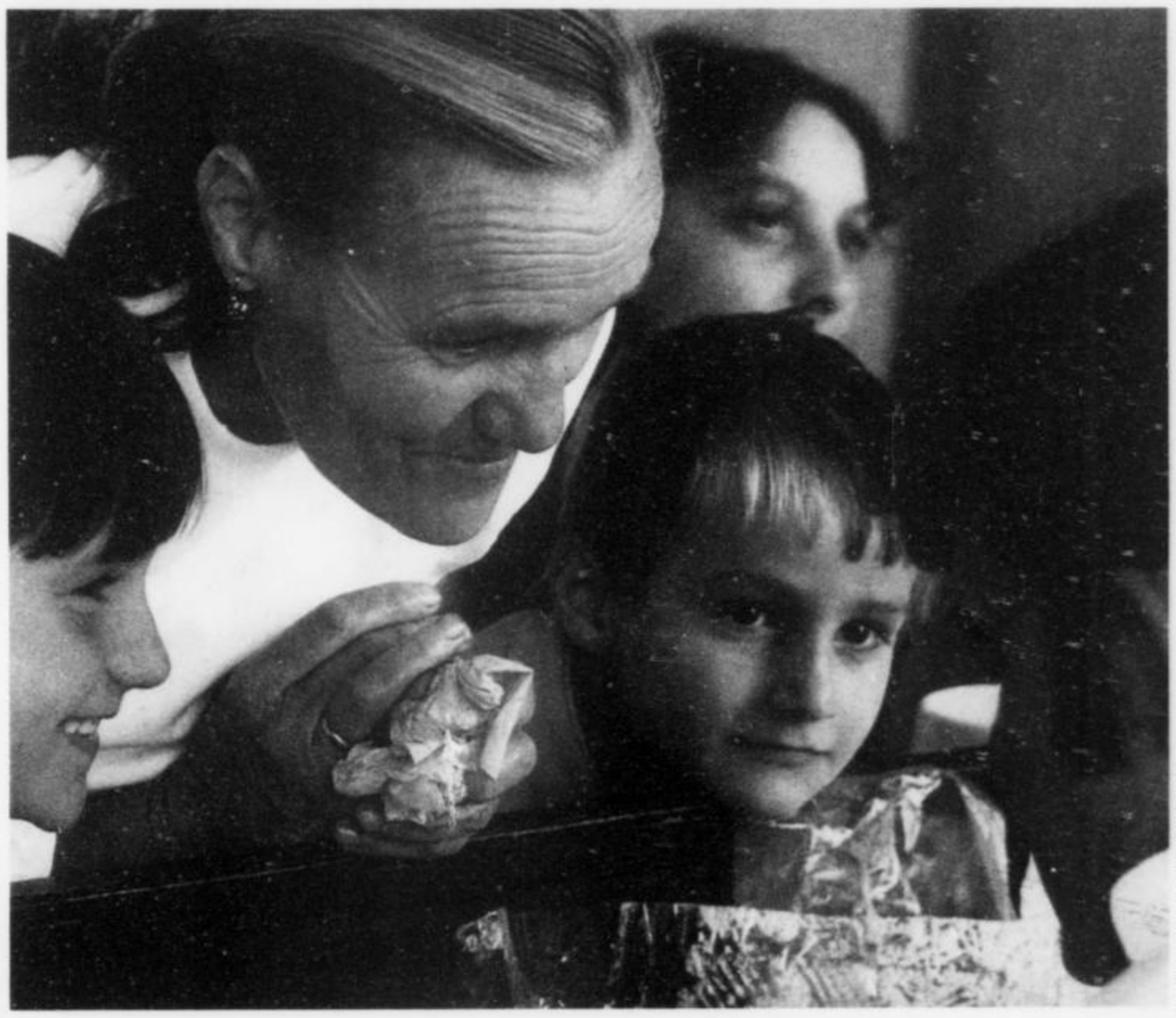
© Mac Guiness/Vu, Paris

A drawing class in a Chinese prison for minors.

© G. Ruschendorf/Rapho, Paris

reveals that most detainees are penniless, and lack education or support; they are outcasts regarded as useless by the rest of society. This is one reason why the application of prisoners' rights still faces so many obstacles.

For many years, the United Nations system (see Fact file, page 38) and numerous governmental and non-governmental organizations have been working to turn the situation round through a series of legal instruments including the European Penitentiary Rules, the American Convention of Human Rights and the African Charter of Human and People's Rights. Respect for human dignity is a basic right of any prisoner, and is a more efficient pillar of the law than humiliation and threats. ■



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Women inmates with their children

"On visiting day at the men's prison, you can see lines of women who have sometimes been waiting to get in since the night before. You don't see that at the women's prisons. The women are left more alone." (Bailiff at the San Martín courthouse)

In Argentina, women who have been charged with an offence or who are serving time can keep their children with them until the age of two. Adriana Lestido spent a year photographing mothers with their children at Los Hornos prison n° 8 in La Plata.

Photos © Adriana Lestido/Vu, Paris

The changing role of prison staff

BY ABDEL-AZIM WAZIR

The role of the prison service has changed. It is no longer simply concerned with keeping prisoners under lock and key. It seeks to equip them to return to live in society.

Correctional facilities have become an important social tool. They systematically use advanced methods and call on a wide variety of experts—doctors, pharmacists, nurses, teachers, librarians, coaches and art instructors. Chaplains take inmates into their pastoral care, and psychiatrists, psychologists and social workers help them sort out their lives. Last but not least, each facility must see to it that inmates leave prison with a trade or profession, whether carpentry or engineering.

Each staff member must have the scientific or technical background required for his or her field, as well as special training to work in a correctional facility. Most are employees although some are volunteers, especially in the area of social services. Volunteers are often very helpful because of the trust they inspire in prisoners.

Administrative staff and warders, as well as specialists, have to learn special skills so that they do not lose sight of their role as educators. Professional and administrative staff can

Opposite page, a homeless child is questioned at an intake centre (Romania).

Opposite page below, a warder in a London prison for women holds a baby belonging to a prisoner.

Below, anxious families ask for news about their children after a police round-up in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil).

© F. Ancellet/Rapho, Paris

© Hien Lam Duc/Vu, Paris

© David Hoffman/Still Pictures, London

do their jobs well only if there is a healthy relationship between inmates and warders.

Progress in training courses, which cover social problems as well as specific professional topics, is measured by theoretical and practical testing. Raising the level of recruitment in this way enhances the social standing of prison employees and helps ensure they will work with a spirit of integrity.

It is just as important to provide training for serving prison staff, most of whom began their careers when prior training was not required. Trained personnel should also have regular opportunities to brush up on their skills and update their working methods. ■

The hard way back

BY AMADOU CISSÉ DIA

After eight years and four months in custody, I was released on parole two years ago.

At the end of the day, a prisoner's release depends on the law, in the fullest sense of the term. The system must not only be concerned with punishment; it should also keep track of each inmate's moral development by means of interviews. The prison service must be interested in their fate. In the facility where I was held, administrators and warders kept an eye on every move we made, good or bad, and wrote up reports on our behaviour. I believe those reports play a decisive role.

During my eight years of confinement, I saw several judges visit the prison to make direct contact with certain inmates. That enabled them to understand the prisoners' true personalities. I am sure that this in-depth knowledge is crucial in the decision to release them.

Getting back into society is a tough proposition for any ex-convict. But people must realize that in some cases crime is a curable disease. An inmate who really wants to change, who has thought deeply during his years inside and who has come to enjoy work knows what he wants to become and what he wants to do. He has a clear picture of his past and present. He knows why his life has been filled with pain and suffering and he thinks back nostalgically to when he was a child.

He would like to have a second chance.

He finally manages to understand society, something he had never done before because he had never stopped and taken a close look at human behaviour. He discovers the self-respect and inner peace that come with honest work. He wants to cling to happiness with all his might. That is why it is vital for an ex-convict to find a way to make a living.

The road to rehabilitation is fraught with pitfalls that only the bravest souls can avoid. The main problem is the relationship with society; an ex-convict needs plenty of understanding.

Speaking for myself, I am successfully working my way back into society. I am starting to make my mark as a painter. I managed on my own to obtain a commission to paint a large fresco in a bank. Some of my works are in local collections and I am earning an honest living.

I had already dabbled in painting before I went into prison, but it was while I was inside that I began to take it seriously. By steadily and painstakingly devoting myself to painting all those years, I acquired a passion for work. ■

© ENDA, Dakar

Painter Amadou Cissé Dia at the opening of one of his exhibitions in Dakar (Senegal) in 1994.

Political prisoners

BY DIRK VAN ZYL SMIT

Inmates whose status is a subject of controversy

Few concepts in penology are as contentious as that of the "political prisoner", the implication of which is that such prisoners form a discrete group of detainees who, because of the nature of the conduct for which they have been incarcerated, should be treated differently.

The first point of contention is usually as to whether the existence of a discrete category of political prisoners should be recognized. The qualification "political" indicates that the prisoners concerned have committed acts which directly challenge the authority and legitimacy of the government that is detaining them. Recognizing that they are "political prisoners" therefore entails recognition by a government that it is facing a challenge going beyond that posed by "ordinary criminals", whose infringement of the laws of the land is not aimed specifically at the government itself. The result is that governments are often very reluctant to admit that they are holding "political prisoners" in their gaols.

In democratic societies, it is unacceptable for a government to maintain power by imprisoning those who do not support it. Where large numbers of a government's opponents are imprisoned without trial under emergency legislation or following the declaration of martial law, it is difficult for that government to deny outright that it is holding people in its gaols for political reasons. Governments that act in this way usually claim that such measures are temporary and intended to prevent disorder. In these circumstances, public campaigns demanding that such detainees be either charged or released may be very effective, since the government has already conceded the principle that its conduct is undemocratic.

Terrorists or freedom fighters?

The position is more complicated if opponents of a government are imprisoned after having been charged and convicted under the criminal law. Such a course is attractive to governments, since it enables them to deny that ▶

Above, South African political prisoners and their families explode with joy in a post-release rehabilitation centre.

© Darryl Evans/Vu, Paris

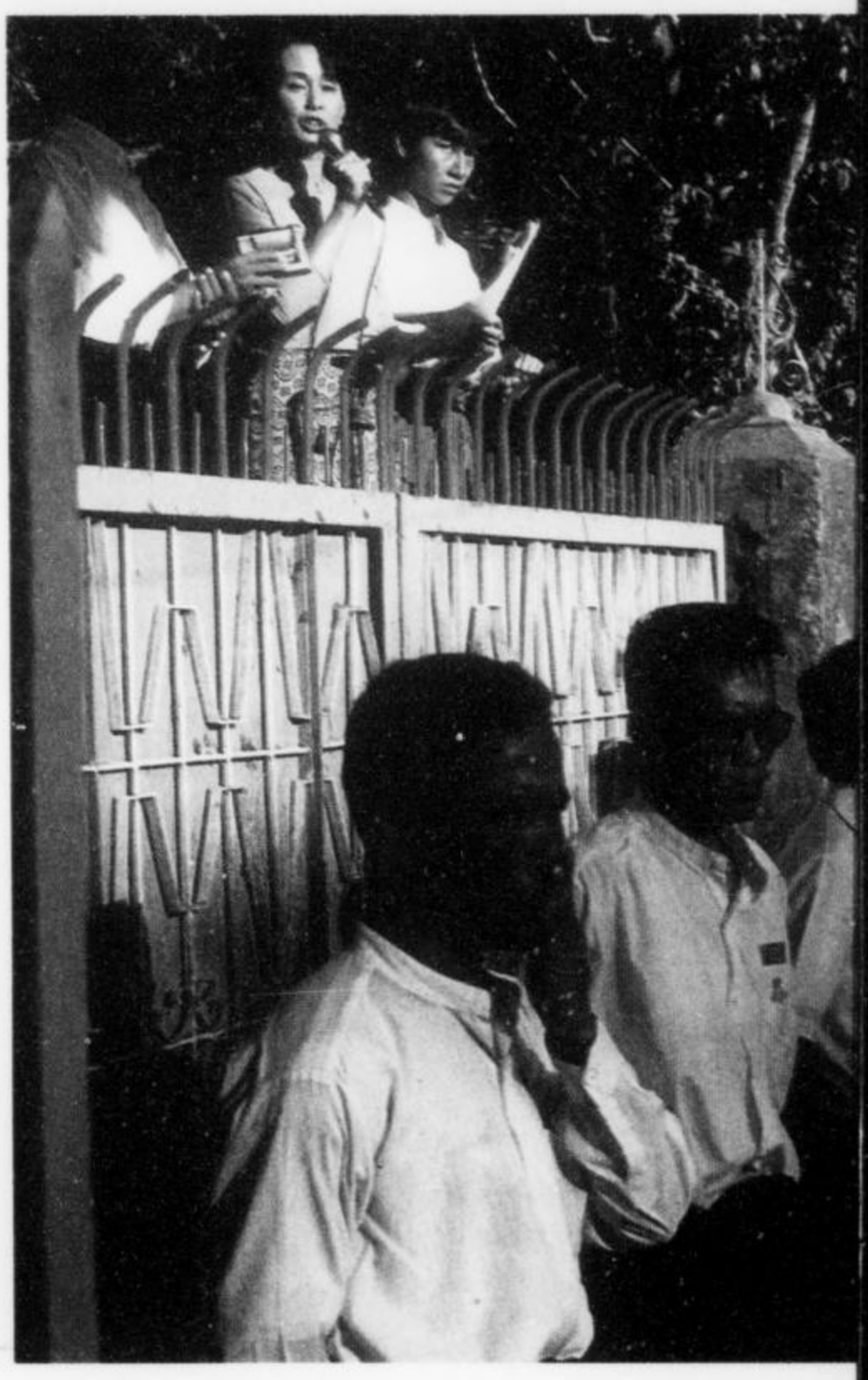
© Miladinovic/Sipa Press, Paris

Former dissident Václav Havel on his election as president of the Czech and Slovak Republic in 1990.

▶ the persons concerned are political prisoners, and to claim that they are being held because they infringed the criminal law and not because they opposed the government of the day. In this way, the government can attempt to capitalize on the legitimacy which the criminal law as a whole possesses in most societies.

Opponents of a government imprisoned after being convicted by the criminal courts can and do object to their incarceration on a number of grounds. Most simply and directly, they can claim that they were not guilty of the offences with which they were charged, but that their convictions were the result of biased or unfair procedures. Second, they can challenge the offences as defined in the criminal law by arguing that they were not "ordinary crimes" but conduct which had been criminalized by the government in order to muzzle its opponents. Third, they can reject their convictions directly by arguing that the conduct which the government attempts to criminalize, treason for example, is justified because of the essential illegitimacy of the government itself.

Debates about what constitute political offences and who should be regarded as political prisoners may transcend national borders. When one state seeks the extradition of an alleged offender from another state in order to bring him or her to trial, international law



The Burmese political leader Aung San Suu Kyi (upper left, holding microphone), was held under house arrest in Rangoon from 1989 to 1995. In 1991 she was awarded the Nobel peace prize.

allows the request to be denied if the extradition is being sought to try that person for an offence of a political character. This exception to general extradition agreements is controversial. States or their courts differ about whether a particular offence is political in character. States may also agree among themselves that certain forms of conduct are so reprehensible that their perpetrators should be subject to extradition, irrespective of the fact that they were conducted with a political motive. International conventions which allow the extradition of persons suspected of aircraft hijacking or terrorism are examples of an emerging international consensus to limit the political offence exception, but the difficulty remains that a person who is regarded as a terrorist by some may be regarded as a freedom fighter by others.

'Prisoners of conscience'

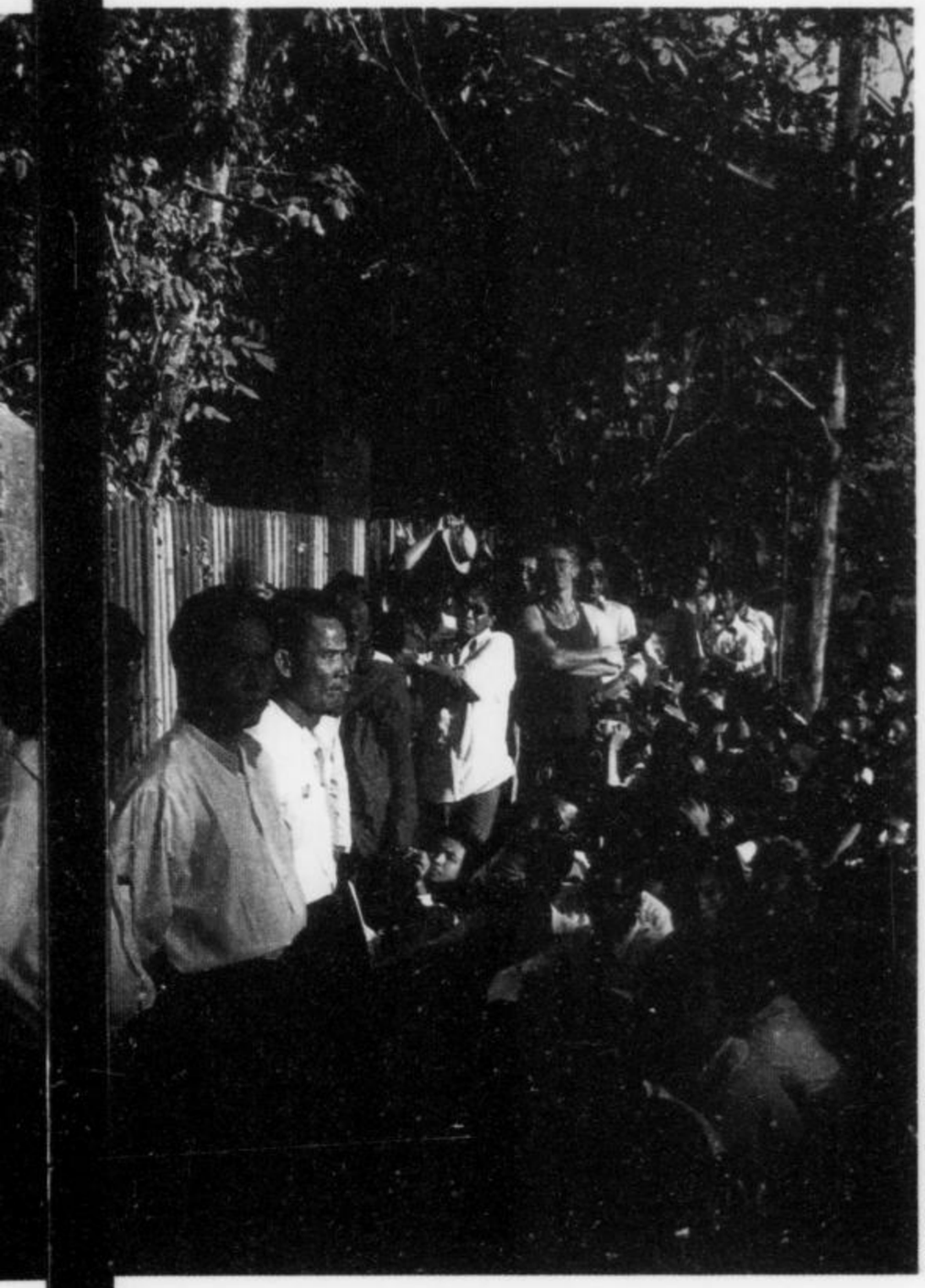
One way to avoid difficulties of definition is by focusing on only some of all those detainees who may be regarded as political prisoners. Amnesty International, for example, has been particularly successful with its campaigns on behalf of "prisoners of conscience". It has defined as prisoners of conscience all persons detained because of their beliefs, but has specifically excluded those who have used or advocated violence. This meets the objection that the organization is supporting the cause of "violent terrorists". However, many prisoners who were motivated by political ends and who may have turned to violence only as a last resort have been excluded. On this test, for example, Nelson Mandela could not be regarded as a political prisoner, for in his many years in prison he did not renounce the violent overthrow of the then South African Government.

© Trippett/Sipa Press

Apartheid opponent Nelson Mandela spent nearly 30 years in prison. In 1993 he shared the Nobel peace prize with Frederik De Klerk and was elected president of the Republic of South Africa the following year.

In practice, the solution of the problem as to who is a political prisoner has often been pragmatic. Typically, governments insist that all those who claim political status are ordinary criminals, but mete out different treatment to certain subgroups of them. In Northern Ireland, for example, the British Government consistently refused to grant Republican or Loyalist detainees the status of political prisoners, but at various times granted them a special-category status, which meant that they were subject to regimes very different from those applied to other prisoners. Attempts to reverse this special-category status met with strong resistance from the prisoners.

Even qualified recognition of a special political prisoner status has potential advantages for the prisoners concerned. At the most general level, such public acknowledgment that their actions are motivated by ideals of social and political change may advance their cause. Even limited special status may mean ▶



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▸ that prisoners whose alleged offences were politically motivated are grouped together. There are numerous examples of such prisoners developing increased solidarity and commitment to their shared cause while in prison. There are also examples of individual political prisoners obtaining a special status while in prison because the government that put them there recognized that it might have to negotiate with them at some future date.

Recognition of a special political prisoner status is potentially a mixed blessing, however. There are many examples of political prisoners being treated with particular severity. Quite simply, a state may decide to use its prison system to break the morale of its opponents. Labour and concentration camps in wartime are variations of the prison system which have been used to this end, with depressing frequency. There are even instances of courts colluding in this process. In South Africa, for example, in 1978, a group of prisoners managed to approach the highest court in the land to ask for some access to news of current events. In court, they defined themselves as political prisoners, a status which the authorities at that time vigorously contested. The court accepted this self-imposed categorization but used it to argue that, precisely because the applicants were political prisoners, they could be denied news which was routinely available to other prisoners.

When the rule of law is flouted

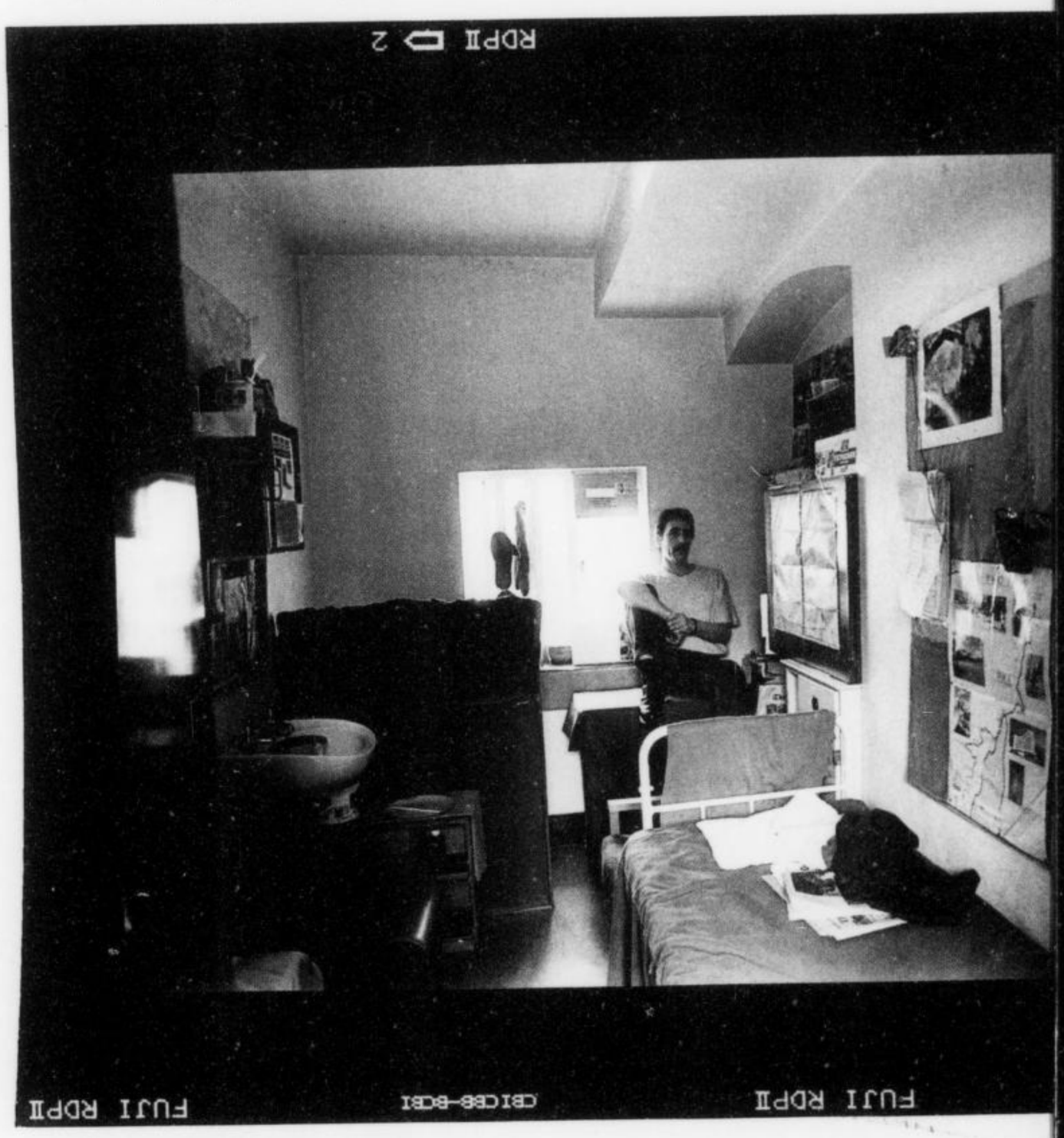
In practice, the status of political prisoners may also play a part in determining when they will be released from custody. In this respect too, the impact may be positive or negative. Political prisoners may be required to serve a far higher portion of their sentence before being considered for parole. On the other hand, a change of regime or even a shift in the political climate may lead to early release for those whose offences may be regarded in the new circumstances as being of a political character.

Such flexibility is contrary to the rule of law, since it indicates that, where political prisoners are concerned, executive intervention is allowed to disrupt the normal operation of the criminal justice system. The rule of law requires the system to operate according to clear, previously determined and impartial principles. The fact that the rule of law is routinely flouted in these instances indicates that the imprisonment of political dissidents is never an ideal way of solving a political dispute, but is an admission of failure in the political sphere.

Governments should recognize that when prisoners claim political status it is a signal that they and the section of the population which supports them feel excluded from the political process. Almost certainly, political solutions rather than the intervention of the criminal justice system are required to meet this challenge. ■

The snow-covered yard, by Michael Inns.

© Michael Inns/*Inside Eye*/Panos Pictures, London



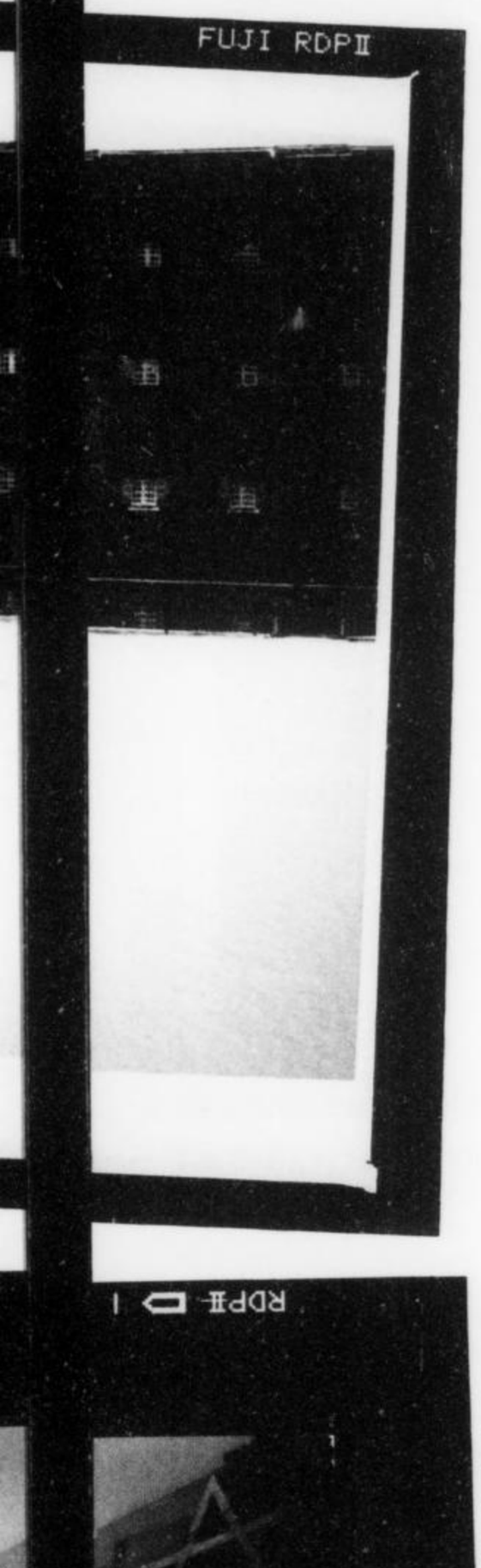
My friend Sami, by Mohamed Manssor.

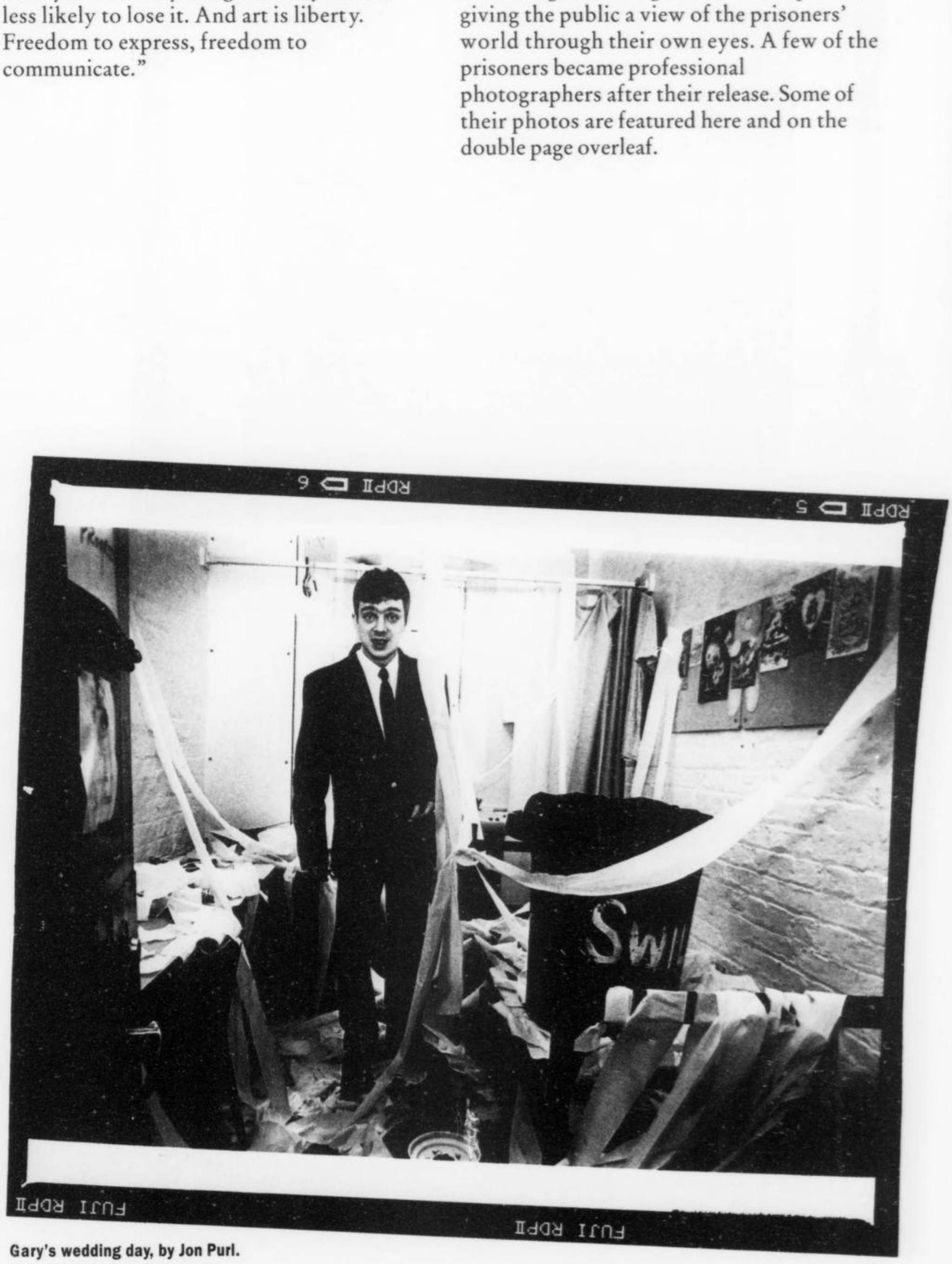
© Mohamed Manssor/*Inside Eye*/Panos Pictures, London

Prison through prisoners' eyes

"... there is a better way to deal with our problems of crime and punishment than the one we have at the moment. That way involves education and understanding. By putting more people in prison we are not going to solve the problem. And if people have been in prison we should urgently help them not to go back in. Depriving them of their liberty is their punishment, not treating them inhumanely. Help them prize liberty above everything and they will be less likely to lose it. And art is liberty. Freedom to express, freedom to communicate."

These lines are from a book of photographs entitled *Wandsworth Prison as Seen through the Prisoners' Eyes*, by Marc Schlossman and Adri Berger ("Inside Eye", London, 1997). Inmates themselves took pictures of everyday life in the prison. The project, entitled *Inside Eye*, was the brainchild of a group of British photographers who in 1993 had the idea of teaching Wandsworth inmates photographic skills and then exhibiting their images outside the prison, giving the public a view of the prisoners' world through their own eyes. A few of the prisoners became professional photographers after their release. Some of their photos are featured here and on the double page overleaf.





Gary's wedding day, by Jon Purl.

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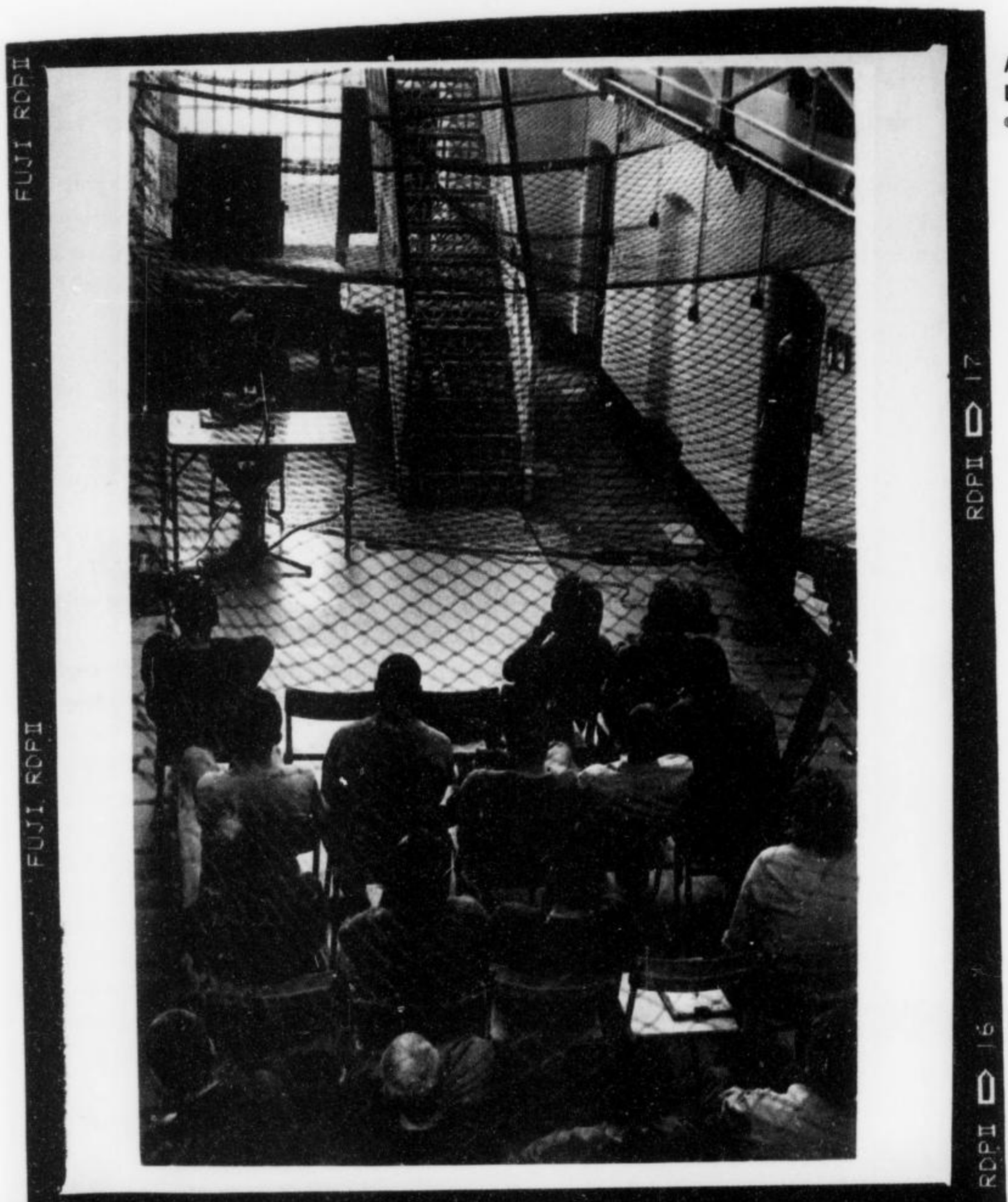
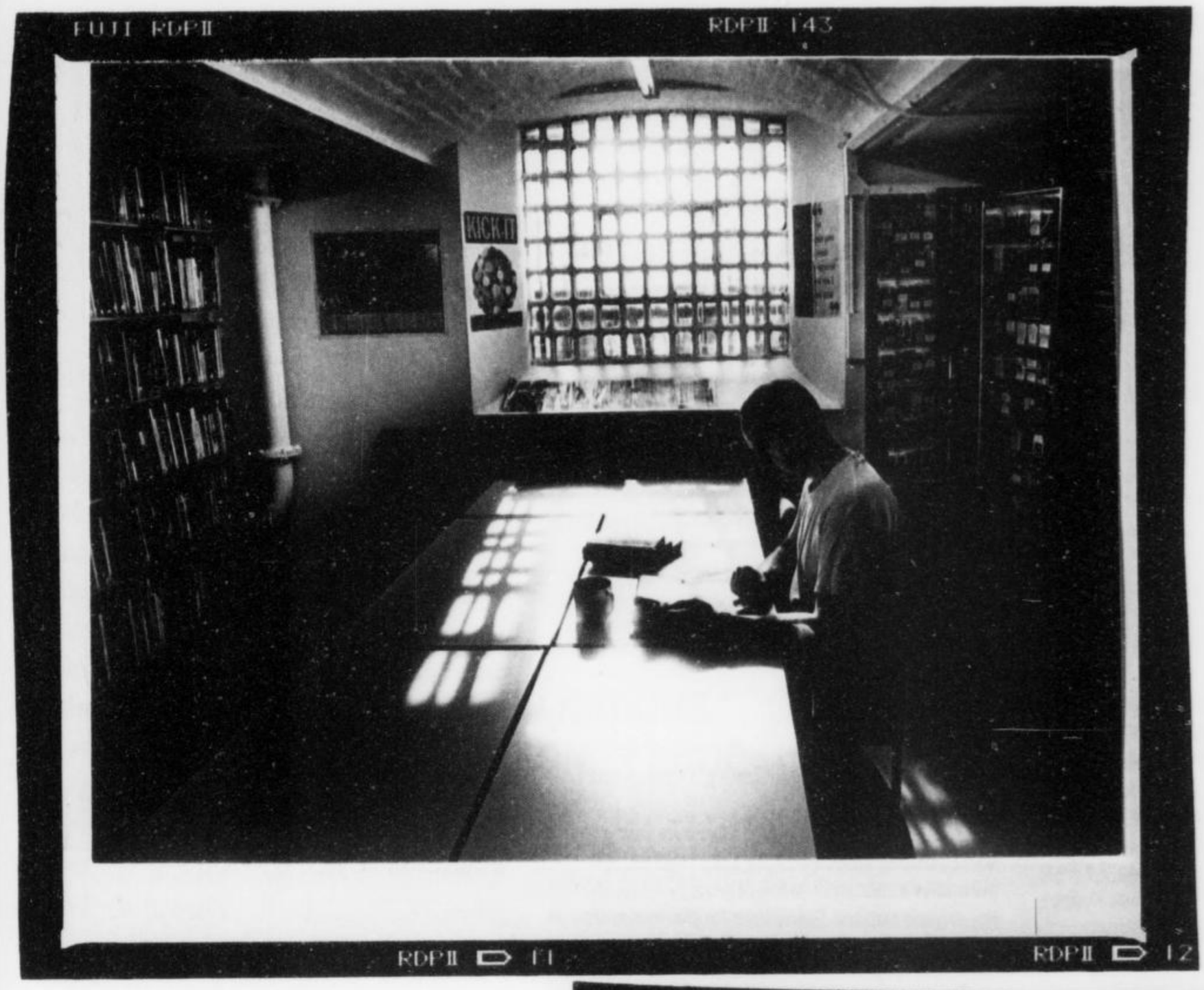


A guest speaker talks to the prisoners, by Dennis Hudson.

© Dennis Hudson/*Inside Eye*/Panos Pictures, London

The workout, by Steve.

© Steve/*Inside Eye*/Panos Pictures, London



The library, by Sid and Larry.

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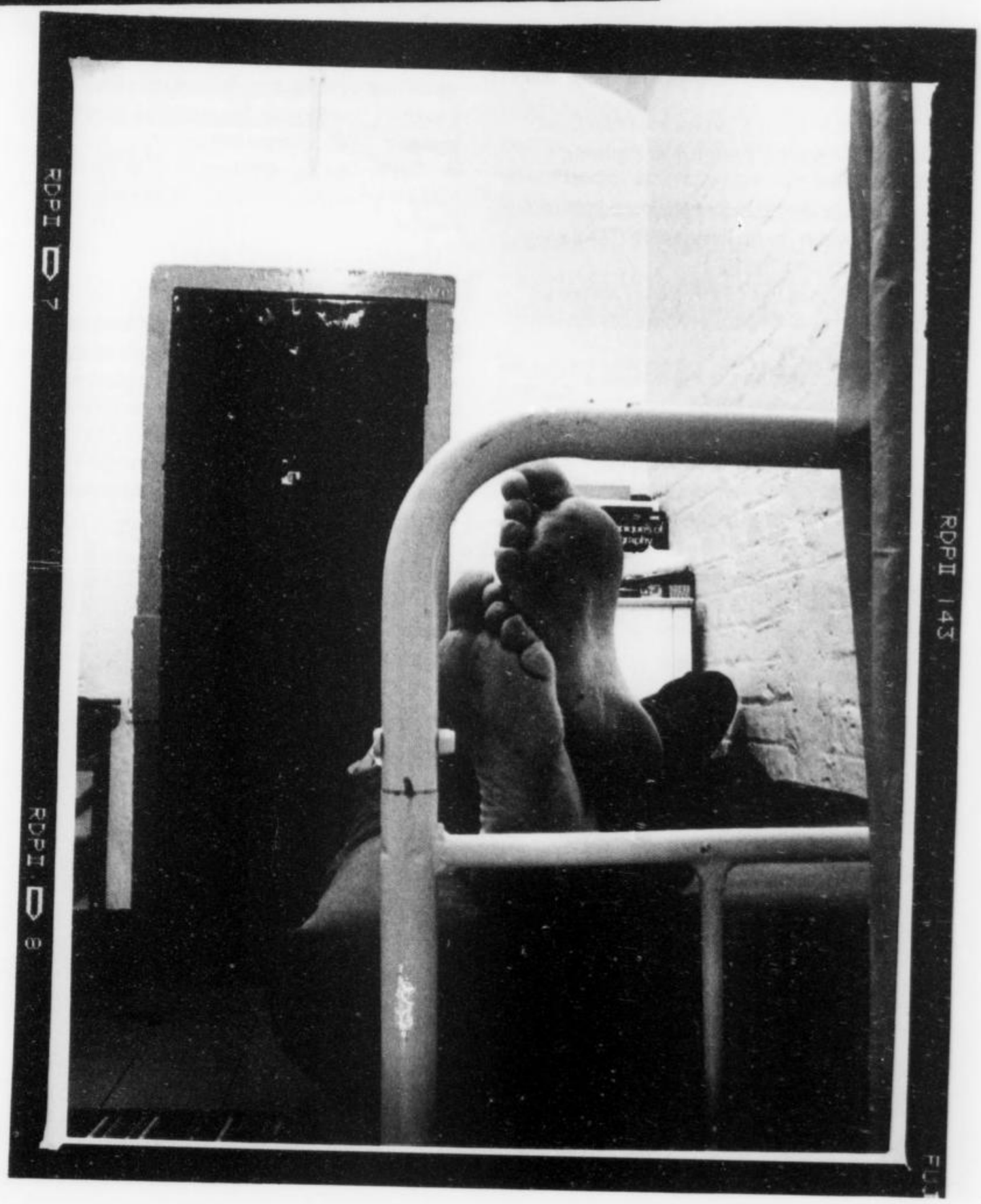


Self-portrait, by Michael Inns.

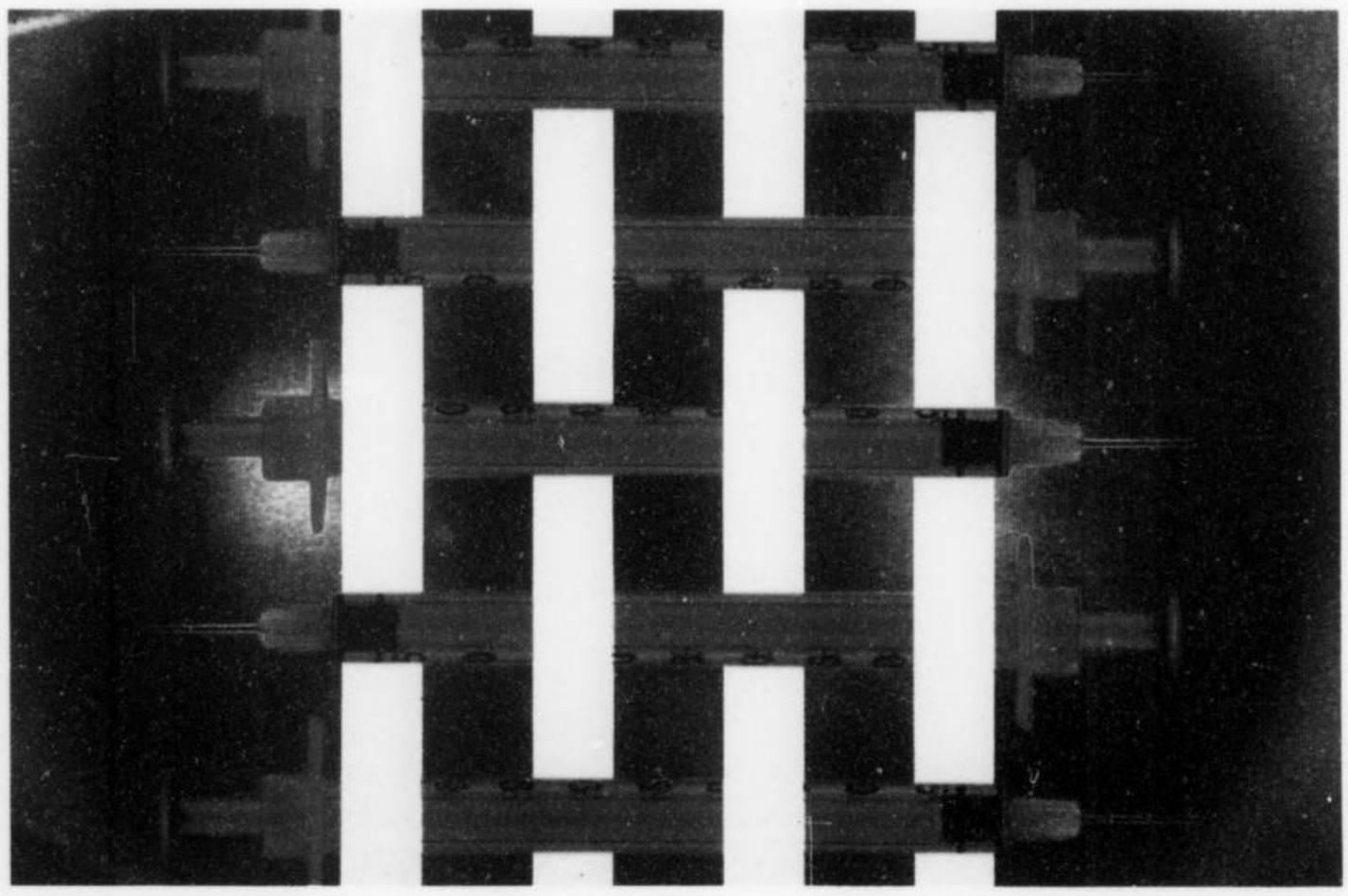
© Michael Inns/*Inside Eye*/Panos Pictures, London

FACT FILE

United Nations international instruments concerning the protection of persons subjected to detention or imprisonment

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 10 December 1948
- Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, 30 August 1955
- International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, 21 December 1965
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. 16 December 1966
- Declaration on the Rights of Mentally Retarded Persons, 20 December 1971
- Declaration on the Protection of All Persons from Being Subjected to Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, 9 December 1975
- Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials, 17 December 1979
- Principles of Medical Ethics relevant to the Role of Health Personnel, particularly Physicians, in the Protection of Prisoners and Detainees against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, 18 December 1982
- Safeguards Guaranteeing Protection of the Rights of Those Facing the Death Penalty, 25 May 1984
- Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, 10 December 1984
- United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice (The Beijing Rules), 29 November 1985
- Declaration of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power, 29 November 1985
- Basic Principles on the Independence of the Judiciary, 29 November 1985
- Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment, 9 December 1988
- Principles on the Effective Prevention and Investigation of Extra-legal, Arbitrary and Summary Executions, 24 May 1989
- Convention on the Rights of the Child, 20 November 1989
- Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials, 7 September 1990
- Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers, 7 September 1990
- Guidelines on the Role of Prosecutors, 7 September 1990
- Basic Principles for the Treatment of Prisoners, 14 December 1990
- United Nations Rules for the Protection of Juveniles Deprived of their Liberty, 14 December 1990
- United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for Non-custodial Measures (The Tokyo Rules), 14 December 1990
- United Nations Guidelines for the Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency (The Riyadh Guidelines), 14 December 1990
- Model Treaty on the Transfer of Proceedings in Criminal Matters, 14 December 1990
Model Treaty on the Transfer of Supervision of Offenders Conditionally Sentenced or Conditionally Released, 14 December 1990
- Declaration on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, 18 December 1992

Drug Addiction, a poster by Ruedi Baur and Félix Müller (France). This work was shown at an exhibition of posters and writings organized by International Prison Watch, a non-governmental organization based in Lyons (France). The purpose of the group is to monitor prison conditions worldwide and to draw attention to violations of prisoners' rights.



© International Prison Watch, Lyons, France

A UN-UNESCO manual on prison education

Most of the millions of people in the world's prisons and other correctional institutions have had no higher education. Even in countries with a universal right of access to 10 or more years of schooling, a large minority faces difficulties in reading, writing and numeracy and in conducting social transactions. Providing them with basic education is a prerequisite for achieving the internationally agreed goal of ensuring a basic level of education for all.

Some of the ways in which prison education can be promoted and some existing practices in countries throughout the world are reviewed in *Basic Education in Prisons*,[1] a manual published jointly by the United Nations and the UNESCO Institute for Education (UIE), UNESCO's specialized centre for research and development in adult and continuing education.

The manual arose from a UIE project to investigate basic education in prisons and in response to a United Nations request for a tool to provide the basis for development of prison education and to promote international exchange of expertise and experience in this field.

Designed for decision makers, administrators, educators and non-governmental organizations concerned with education in penal establishments, *Basic Education in Prisons* reports on the status and potential of prison education strategies, giving considerable attention to the views of practitioners and, where possible, of inmates. This overview is complemented by case studies from Botswana, China, Costa Rica, Egypt, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, Sri Lanka and the U.S.A. ■

1 *Basic Education in Prisons*, United Nations Office at Vienna/UNESCO Institute for Education, 203 pp., Hamburg, 1995, ISBN-92-1-130-164-5.

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Street children in Tananarive, the capital of Madagascar, where around 4,000 homeless children between the ages of 2 and 18 survive by begging and doing odd jobs. The non-governmental humanitarian organization Doctors Without Borders has been running a medical, social and legal assistance programme to help them since 1993.

THE UNITED NATIONS, UNESCO AND PRISONER EDUCATION

The United Nations is the foremost international organization concerned with the global question of prisoner education and has set many standards and norms in this field. UN action has focused on inmates' basic human right to an education designed to concentrate on their mental, physical, social and spiritual development. Its framework has been the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, whose signatories recognize "the right of everyone to education" and that education shall be geared to "the full development of the human personality".

The UN has adopted several sets of prisoner education standards. The most important, the Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (1955), stipulates that "provision shall be made for the further education of all prisoners capable of profiting thereby", and that penal education should be integrated "so far as practicable" with each country's educational system.

Another set of principles, the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice (The Beijing Rules) establishes standards on the rights of juvenile offenders. Rule 26 stipulates that a juvenile penal education system should help young people in institutions "to assume socially constructive and productive roles in society". The focus is on the "wholesome development" of young offenders and on training to ensure that they do not return to society at an "educational disadvantage".

Significant new UN resolutions on prison education were adopted in 1990, including a recommendation that "all prisoners have access to education, including literacy programmes, basic education, vocational training, creative, religious and cultural activities, physical education and sports, social education, higher education and library facilities".

While UNESCO had previously said little on the specific subject of prisoner education at the international level, the Fourth International UNESCO Conference on Adult Education (1985) adopted a declaration on the right to learn for all, which consists of: a) the right to read and write; b) the right to question and analyse; c) the right to imagine and create; d) the right to read about one's own world and to write history; e) the right to have access to educational resources; f) the right to develop individual and collective skills. Like the human rights articulated by the UN, these UNESCO rights are considered fundamental, with the goal of developing the whole personality. This means that prisoners should be given access wherever possible to libraries, laboratories, workshops, cultural events and similar educational resources to develop themselves to the fullest extent.

The Fifth International Conference on Adult Education, organized by the UNESCO Institute for Education in Hamburg, 14-18 July 1997, adopted the Hamburg Declaration on Adult Learning and its accompanying Agenda for the Future which sets out in detail UNESCO's new commitment to adult learning. The Agenda recognizes "the right to learn of all prison inmates: a) By providing prison inmates with information on and access to different levels of education and training; (b) By developing and implementing comprehensive education programmes in prisons, with the participation of inmates, to meet their needs and learning aspirations; (c) By making it easier for non-governmental organizations, teachers and other providers of educational activities to work in prisons, thereby providing prisoners with access to educational institutions and encouraging initiatives that link courses carried out inside and outside prisons." ■

For further information on the 1997 conference:
Internet:
http://www.education.unesco.org/confintea

Bibliography:

Further reading in the UNESCO Collection of Representative Works:

- ✔ *The Lava of this Land, South African Poetry 1960-1996*, Denis Hirson (ed.), 1997
- ✔ *The Prisoner*, Fakhar Zaman, 1996
- ✔ *Journal de la félicité*, Nicolae Steinhardt, 1995
- ✔ *South African Short Stories*, D.Hirson with M. Trump (eds.), 1994
- ✔ *Post-scriptum et autres nouvelles*, Vassili Choukchine, 1997

From the *UNESCO Courier*:

- ✔ "The education of prisoners", Stephen Duguid, April 1996 (*Learning to Learn*)

The above publications are on sale at:
UNESCO Publishing, 7, Place de Fontenoy, 75352 Paris 07 SP, France.
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Unesco/Gil Jacques, Montréal

commentary

Federico Mayor

For a broader

In our rapidly changing world, literacy should be seen as an important evolutionary variable in every society. For the further a society progresses, the more it needs to adjust and adapt to new demands and pressures, so that literacy is a lifelong necessity for all.

Literacy, in the broad sense, is the foundation for life skills, ranging from basic oral and written communication to the ability to solve scientific and social problems. Today it involves much more than the acquisition of the 3Rs and a limited set of traditional skills. It is linked with the changing demands of life in a given socio-cultural context.

This means that local communities should be fully involved in defining the content of literacy progammes. The local dimension of literacy is extremely important, not only for accommodating the real needs of learners, but also for taking into account the linguistic and cultural realities of multicultural societies. For in the end, only the learners actually decide what they need to learn.

Building bridges between cultures

I am very pleased to see that this broader, more dynamic and culturally sensitive stance is accepted by most literacy specialists. It marks a long overdue acknowledgment of the positive role that local languages and cultures can play in removing some of the serious pedagogical and psychological hurdles often encountered by learners. It is the only way to ensure the relevance and authenticity of literacy work.

I should like to insist here on the importance of multilingual education. Today education is as much about learning to live together as learning to know, to do and to be. Yet we cannot live together if our possibilities of expression are limited to a single linguistic frame. This is often at the root of problems encountered in multicultural societies. Of course, inequality in all its forms is a major factor. But internal conflicts often have purely cultural causes. It is more difficult for people to forge links with each other when they cannot communicate linguistically.

Yet children learn languages easily—much more so than the adults who take the decisions. We need to take much greater advantage of this fact. Children are expected to store too much information in their "hard memory"—much of it frankly useless! Giving them language skills provides them with bridges between cultures, enabling them to grow up without the debilitating sense that other cultures are alien. It is UNESCO's task to try to ensure that education at all levels, and particularly basic education, promotes multilingualism. And we must *invest* in such education, since to do so is to invest in peace.

It is also important to remind ourselves that literacy

'If we truly believe in lifelong learning, and if we seriously believe in redressing the balance of learning in our societies, then we should seek to develop in every country an open and more enabling system of education.'

approach to education

is not a neutral process which can be applied in all situations, all the time, regardless of social and economic realities. Such a narrow concept of literacy ignores its critical role as a tool of empowerment. The Brazilian educator Paulo Freire compared to banking those methods that treat adult learners as empty vessels waiting to be filled with predetermined bodies of knowledge disconnected from their social experience. Literacy must provide space for intellectual development, motivations for learning and a sense of self-esteem, if it is to be a genuine education for empowerment.

Bringing adult education into the mainstream

Many individuals and families around the world are facing unexpected changes in the pattern of their daily lives, disrupting their plans for the future. The demands on educational services are increasing dramatically, especially in countries where the state is the main provider of education for children and adults. In today's world, we cannot afford a short-sighted approach which, in effect, excludes adult education from the mainstream of the education system, even after the concept of lifelong learning has been accepted as a framework for educational policy.

Literacy programmes must be given the priority they deserve. Lifelong learning for all requires quality adult education and literacy programmes with qualified personnel, relevant teaching programmes, appropriate post-literacy materials and decent facilities. We must ask ourselves whether we really are prepared to make the necessary investments in adult education and literacy to ensure universal access to the types of programmes needed to reach the targets of education for all.

If we truly believe in lifelong learning, and if we seriously believe in redressing the balance of learning in our societies, then we should seek to develop in every country an open and more enabling system of education, breaking with past concepts of education as something which happens to people between the ages of six and twenty and which only the privileged few were entitled to. Synergy has to be created between formal and non-formal education programmes.

A case in point is the family literacy concept. We all know that the continuing education of parents, particularly when they are illiterate or under-educated, can contribute very effectively to their children's success in school. In fact, the family literacy approach is one of the most effective ways of breaking the cycle of inter-generational illiteracy. Education and training policies should include all types of learning, whether it takes place in a school, in the workplace or at home. There should be more innovation and creativity in using different methods and approaches. ■

GREENWATCH

Water: will be there enough?

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BY FRANCE BEQUETTE

Humankind has a special relationship with water. In every civilization, the most ancient traditions associate this precious resource with the origins of life, purification and regeneration. Far from being a mere raw material such as oil, water is vital for life, indispensable to the economy and so rich in symbolic value that it triggers passionate responses. "All the computers in the world will never be able to express the real perception of the value of water or codify the interactions between it and peoples," says Andras Szöllösi-Nagy, director of UNESCO's Division of Water Sciences and secretary of the International Hydrological Programme (IHP). "But that is precisely UNESCO's role—to tackle an issue that involves science, culture, education and communication."

For decades, experts have been making grim forecasts that the Earth will start running out of water and that conflicts over this precious liquid will erupt into wars. The situation is indeed alarming. In the first half of 1998, two international conferences on the world's water resources took place at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris. The theme of the first, organized by the French government and held in March, was Water and Sustainable Development. The second, in June, was jointly organized by UNESCO and the International Association of Hydrological Sciences and entitled "Water: A Looming Crisis?" Both events took stock of current knowledge, and participants discussed ways of coping with the problem.

How much water is there in the earth's reserves? Highly expensive probes have been sent to the moon, Mars and the satellites of Jupiter and Saturn to find out whether there is water on them, but we still lack accurate data about the earth's hydrological resources. Such information would help to provide a clearer picture of the future and, especially, to foresee the global repercussions of demographic and climate change.

One thing we know about water is that there is plenty of it. The total volume is put at 1.4 billion cubic kilometres—which could be imagined as a 2,650-metre-deep layer of liquid evenly distributed over the entire surface of the planet. But 98% of it is salt water, mainly in the oceans and seas. Most of the earth's fresh water is trapped in the polar ice caps. Less than 1% of it is available in lakes, rivers and shallow, easily-accessible aquifers. These water resources are constantly in flux. Water from the oceans and land evaporates into the atmosphere before falling again as rain or snow, nourishing plants and swelling rivers that flow into the sea. It also seeps through the ground and percolates down to aquifers. Very deep groundwater, known as fossil water, is impervious to seepage and not renewable.

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Women fetch water in Rajasthan (India).

Itaipu dam on the Parana river (Brazil and Paraguay).

In the industrialized countries, all you have to do is turn a tap and before you know where you are you've used a considerable amount of water—up to 600 litres per person a day in the United States. In hot developing countries, where shanty-towns on the edges of cities are crowded with growing numbers of migrants from the rural areas, a spigot and two litres of water a day are a luxury. "In the 1950s," says Mahmoud Abu-Zeid, president of the World Water Council, "only a few countries had this problem. But in the late 1990s, water is scarce in 26 countries where 300 million people live. Forecasts for 2050 indicate that 66 countries with approximately two-thirds of the world's population will experience a moderate to severe water shortage."

Over 1.3 billion people received improved drinking water services and some 750 million got better sanitation facilities during the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade (1980-1990). But, says Mr. Abu-Zeid, approximately 1.2 billion people still have no access to drinking water and 2.9 billion lack sanitation. The resulting water-borne diseases take the lives of five million people a year, most of them children.

Farming and manufacturing account for most of the world's water consumption, far outdistancing human needs. Of the 3,240 km^3 of fresh water drawn every year, says the World Resources Institute, only 8% are used for human consumption. Each year fewer than ten countries use 60% of the world's 40,000 billion m^3 of surface and groundwater. Lastly, per capita consumption rises with the standard of living, ranging from 260 litres a day per person in Israel to 200 in Europe, 70 for a Palestinian on the West Bank and 30 in Africa.

THE DANGERS OF IRRIGATION

Demand runs highest in places where irrigation is indispensable, such as central Asia, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, Madagascar and also in some industrially developed countries such as the United States. Farming accounts for two-thirds of the total water resources used by humans—a figure that rises to 80% in the Southern countries. Developing countries consume twice as much water per hectare of irrigated land as industrialized nations, yet their production is three times lower.

Because of the heat, half the water evaporates in storage areas (1 m^3 per 8 m^3 at the Aswan dam in Egypt, for example) or when flowing through open-air irrigation canals. Poorly-conceived irrigation projects lead to deterioration of the soil, as French geographer and drought expert Monique Mainget demonstrates, using two examples.

The first is Pakistan. During the first half of the twentieth century, 10 million hectares were abundantly irrigated in the Indus plain. Waterlogging caused by irrigation, combined with a high rate of evaporation, has led to salinization of the soil, making it unproductive. The second example, the Aral Sea in the former Soviet Union, is different but the result is the same. Much of the water from the Syrdarya and Amu Darya rivers that flow into the huge lake has been diverted to feed 180,000 km of irrigation canals, only 12% of which have been made watertight. The rivers' flow is considerably restricted and the Aral Sea is drying up. "Irrigation for agricultural purposes is expensive," Ms. Mainguet says. "To make it profitable, farmers must use massive amounts of pesticides, herbicides and fertilizer on increasingly exhausted soil. The impact of pesticides on health has been overlooked. The child morbidity and mortality rates are among the world's highest."

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) says that 10 to 20% of the water used for agricultural purposes could be saved with more efficient irrigation methods. One case in point is the *foggaras*, underground canals which have been used since ancient times in Iran, Chile and the oases of North Africa, to carry water from wells ▸

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▶ located many kilometres away. Another is the modern underground drop-by-drop technique used in Israel. But how can the water needs of the planet's 240 million hectares of irrigated farmland be realistically met?

Industry is less greedy than agriculture, but it still consumes 23% of the planet's available freshwater resources. Michel Batisse, a UNESCO adviser on the environment, says it is primarily used for three purposes: "cooling, production (as part of the product's composition or for processing) and heating (to make steam or ensure the smooth running of the manufacturing process). These categories differ widely in terms of both consumption and pollution."

Untreated waste water is still commonly discharged into the environment, especially in poor countries. But the number of antipollution projects and water treatment plants is on the rise, particularly to stem effluents from pulp mills and nitrogen and phosphorus run-off from the food processing industry. Manufacturers are especially careful to take the necessary precautions when the "polluter pays" principle is applied.

COSTS FOR THE CONSUMER

With water consumption rising twice as fast as population growth, the idea of free water for all is increasingly unrealistic. This precious, shared resource must have a price, and it should be based on a sliding scale to ease the burden on the needy. Even a nominal cost discourages waste. French President Jacques Chirac says it would take at least $400 billion to fund the facilities needed to cover priority water needs over the next ten years worldwide. But "neither taxes, nor development aid will be enough, even though solidarity is a duty."

Consumers must help pay distribution costs, while facilities are financed by local communities and international aid. But this is assuming that equipment is standardized. In Senegal alone, nearly 800 pumping stations are equipped with 62 different types of motors and 67 different kinds of pumps. It is easy to imagine the logistical nightmare of storing spare parts.

Another problem is that experts' analysis of needs based on scientific data are often quite different from the actual requirements of users, whose conception of water is shaped by their own culture, manage it according to their own ethics of sharing and protect and use it according to their own development needs. Very often, there is a lack of communication between government officials, users' organizations and non-governmental partners. Poorly understood water resources management has an immediate negative impact on a community's bal-

Tanzanian villagers fill in a trench containing the pipes of their village's newly installed water supply system.

Giant sprinklers automatically move across a field in Arizona (U.S.A.).

© Bill Gallery/Ask Images, Paris

ance and cohesiveness, penalizing women most of all because they are responsible for fetching water in many developing countries.

A case in point is Maharashtra, India, where a boom in sugar cane production led to an increase in the number of deep wells for irrigation. Shallower wells for domestic consumption ran dry and the women were forced to trudge long distances in search of water, adding considerably to their burden of chores. In Misalai, Tanzania, more women than men volunteered to dig the trenches for a water supply project. But when the pipes were laid, the network went only to the part of the village where local leaders lived. The women decided to stop participating in other development activities for as long as the water was not fairly distributed. Their reaction is all the more understandable since African women spend an average of six hours a day in search of water.

SPRINGS OF WAR?

On the Pacific Ocean island of Tonga, women who had formed their own environmental and health affairs organization boycotted a community sanitation project when the men's committee and the development agency did not involve them in its planning and management. Learning from the experience, neighbouring villages invited both men and women to meetings. Each time project managers, for the sake of convenience, consult only men, the consequences can be dramatic. Men try to appropriate women's land when irrigation drives up its value. The women, deprived of their source of income and their independence, can no longer shop at the market, with the result that the children suffer from malnutrition. This has happened in western Kenya and northern Afghanistan.

In cities, large amounts of water go to waste in drinking water distribution networks. It is estimated that 10% is lost due to leaks in the industrialized countries, a figure that may be as high as 60% in the developing nations. Industrial waste, pollution from non-point sources and lack of sanitation seriously affect municipal water resources. The situation is exacerbated by unauthorized connections to the supply network and the failure of some customers to pay their bills. Meters encourage consumers to save water, but they have not yet come into widespread use around the world. Improving urban water supplies is a major challenge for tomorrow. Fifteen mega-cities already have a population of 10 to 20 million, and their number is expected to double over the next two decades.

Jean-Marc Flores of the FAO says we already consume half the planet's available water resources and demand will outstrip supply by 2025, when the world's population hits 8.3 billion. After that, it will be necessary to introduce water-saving measures or tap reserves of fossil groundwater—provided they have not already been over-exploited. Further complicating the issue is the fact that there are 215 international rivers, as well as approximately 300 groundwater basins and underground aquifers shared by several countries.

Some rivers, such as the Mekong, Paraguay and Senegal, are good examples of joint management of a shared resource. But there are at least 70 water-related flashpoints in Africa, the Middle East and Latin America. No country has actually gone to war over water yet. But a set of factors including demographics, rising demand resulting from improved living standards, the predominance of upstream over downstream—the first-served control the flow of rivers—may stoke smouldering conflicts.

In medieval Europe, kings had the right to "use and abuse" water, which was a private possession and a source of wealth. Those days are over. The right to use this increasingly scarce resource must be part of a community perspective. That is why UNESCO Director-General Federico Mayor has made an appeal for "a new water ethics demonstrating our awareness of the need for fair distribution, partnership and, beyond that, sharing." ■

FOR FURTHER READING:

- ✔ *Man, Drought and Development*, by Monique Mainguet, Springer Verlag (in press)
- ✔ *Small Tropical Islands*, by Anthony Falkland, IHP series no 2
- ✔ *Tropical Cities: Managing their Water*, by John Gladwell and Low Kwai Sim, IHP series no 4
- ✔ *Les femmes dans les zones tropicales humides*, by Annabel Rodda, IHP series no 6
- ✔ *Water and Civilization*, by Fekri A. Hassan and Jerome Delli Priscoli, IHP study, UNESCO, 1997
- ✔ *Ground water*, by Christine Coughanowr, IHP series no 8
- ✔ *Helping Children in the Humid Tropics: Water Education*, by Claudine Brelet-Rueff, IHP series no 11
- ✔ *Culture and Negotiation*, by Guy Olivier Faure and Jeffrey Z. Rubin. A UNESCO-IIASA Project. Sage Publications Inc., London, 1993

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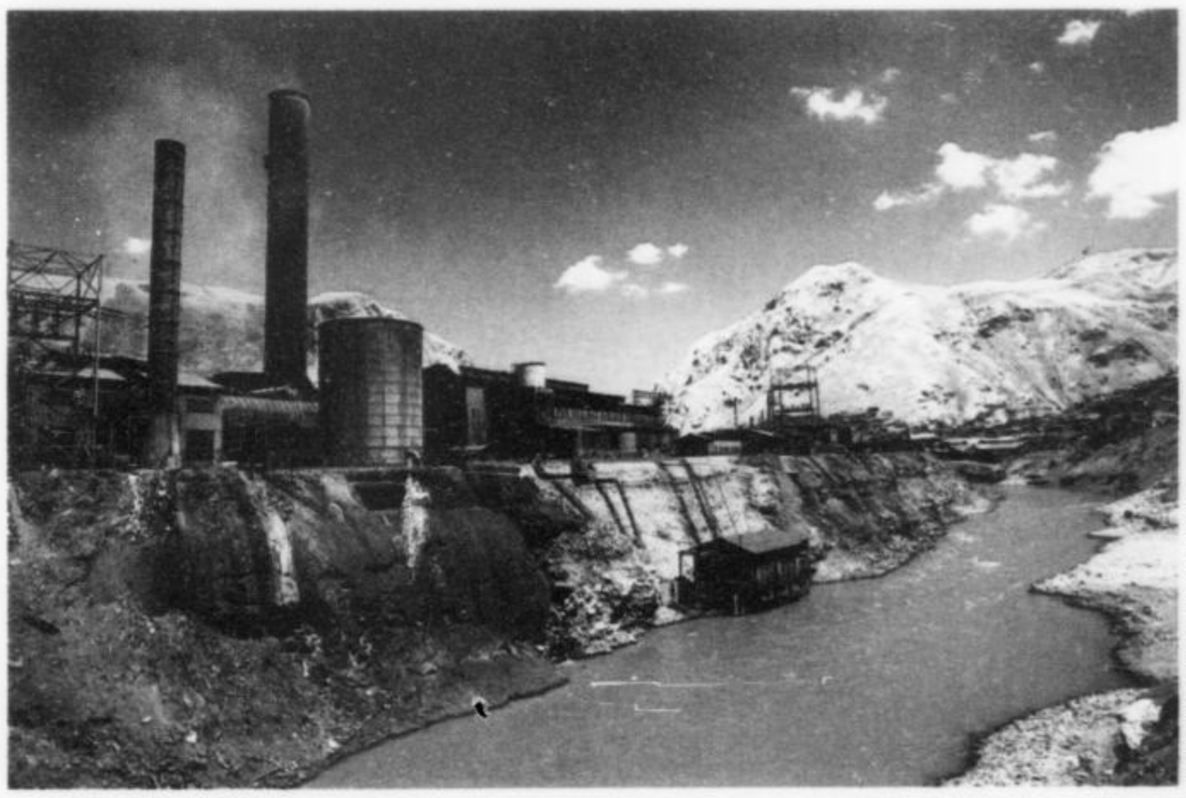

A river polluted by mining in Peru.

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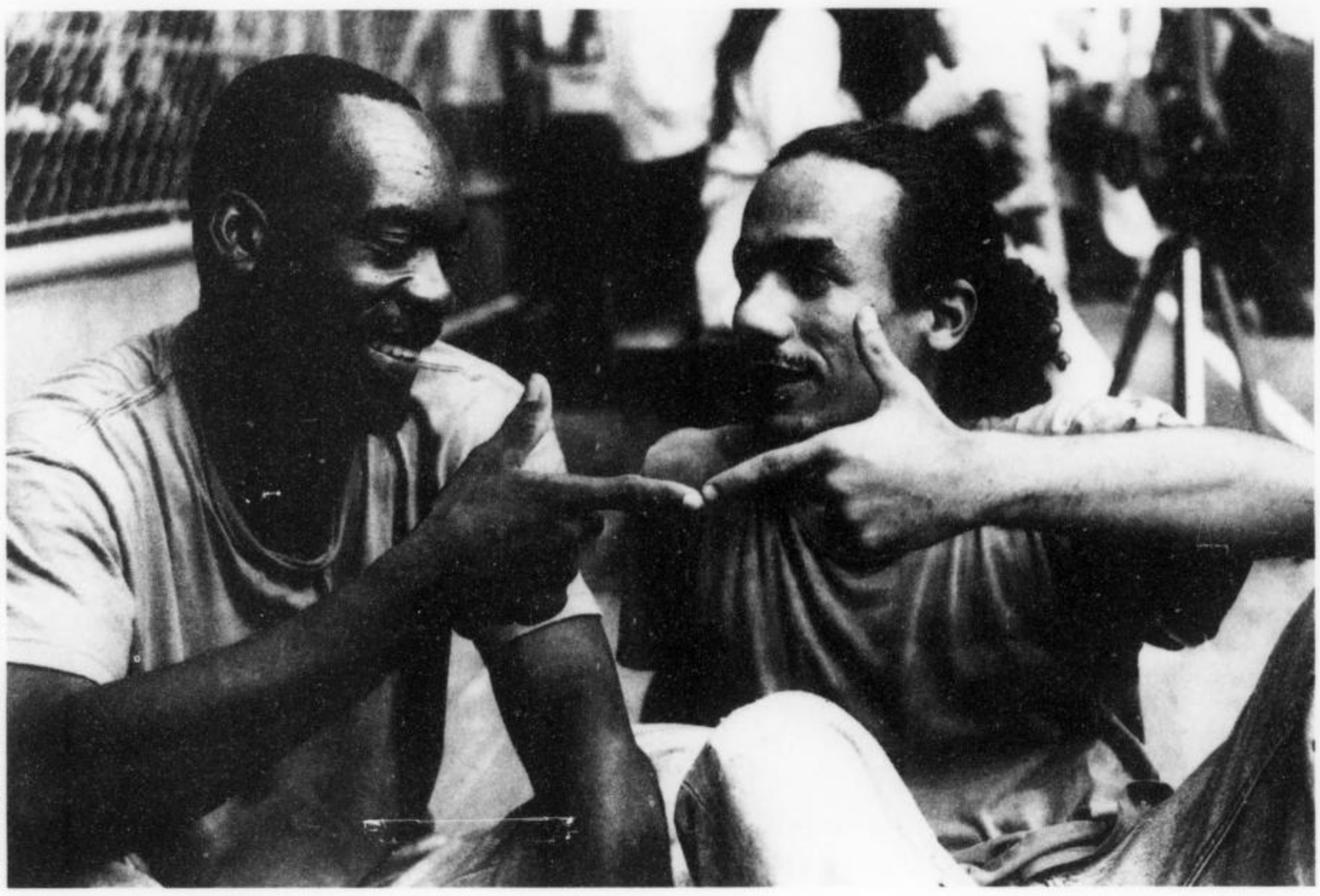
LISTENING

COLOMBIAN *CHAMPETA*

BY ISABELLE LEYMARIE



© Lucas Silva-Marion Provansal/Palenque Records, Paris

A scene from the Colombian-French-Venezuelan film *Les rois créoles de la champeta* (*The Creole Kings of Champeta*) by Lucas Silva and Sergio Arria.

Born in the shanty-towns of Colombia, one of the most inventive forms of popular music today

The Cartagena region, on Colombia's Atlantic coast, is fertile agricultural land which also produces bumper crops of new music. For years, artists from all over the Caribbean performed at the city's popular music festival in the old wooden bullring, an event fostering cross-fertilization between various musical currents. Another rich source of sounds is the San Basilio *palenque*, a former settlement of fugitive slaves 70 kilometres away, which has jealously preserved centuries-old Bantu traditions such as *lumbalú*, a ritual for the dead accompanied by instrumental music, dances and songs. *Son*, a beat from Cuba's Oriente province, came to the *palenque* in the early 1930s, where it is still played on instruments that are no longer used in Cuba.

For many years African slaves passed through Cartagena, and even today the city is the meeting point of a wide array of outside influences. In the late 1960s, seamen brought back records of new African popular music, including soukous from Zaire (which stems from Cuban *son*), *mbaqanga* from South Africa, *makossa* from Cameroon and highlife from Ghana and Nigeria, with which the young local black community immediately identified. Soukous caught on like wildfire among young people from the *palenque* who sensed their Bantu roots in the music.

It wasn't long before local DJs and musicians were experimenting with these rhythms, reinterpreting them in their own way and, in the early eighties, blending them with rap and raggamuffin in lively remixes. That is when a new kind of music emerged in the black neighbourhoods in and around Cartagena and in the San Basilio *palenque*. It was first known as *champeta*, then as *terapia criolla* ("creole therapy"). Today the terms are used interchangeably.

Self-taught musicians

Born in the slums, *champeta* at first developed surreptitiously outside the mainstream of *cumbia* and *vallenato*, internationally known forms of Colombian popular music which also originated on the Atlantic coast, and of salsa, which started in Cuba but has taken deep root in Colombia.

Champeta is played over huge sound systems, or *picós* (from the English term "pick-up"), painted with psychedelic designs in villages and run-down city neighbourhoods. A kind of Latin American soukous, it features a throbbing bass, front-and-centre guitar and

percussion solos, repeated "breaks" and riffs of Haitian *compas*, Trinidadian *soca* and rap. At first it was popular among gangs of hoodlums who squared up to each other around the *picós* with long fishing knives known as *champetas* (hence the name of the music). Then it spread among the working classes, the people of the port and door-to-door salesmen.

Champeta was created by self-taught musicians who sing using both the typically African phrasing of the San Basilio *palenque* and the community's Bantu-based dialect. The records are produced by small, sparsely-equipped, storefront independent labels. Just about anyone can drop in off the street for an *a cappella* audition. But as the Colombian film-maker Lucas Silva shows in his documentary *Los reyes criollos de la champeta* ("The Creole Kings of Champeta"), *champetuos* (exponents of *champeta*) have very fixed ideas when it comes to music. They draw inspiration from everyday life, sometimes even from American cartoons shown on television. Anything is grist for their mill.

A cultural phenomenon

At first, owners of sound systems went down to the docks to buy the latest hit records imported from Africa and the Caribbean from seamen. As in Jamaica, they vied with each other to attract audiences and to see who had the most innovative mixer, the most talkative DJ, the loudest sound system and the widest range of records.

In the 1980s, a handful of Colombian businessmen who realized how popular African music was becoming locally invited African and West Indian groups to the Festival of Caribbean Music. These performers, including Kanda Bongo Man, Bopol Mansiamin and M'Bilial Bel from Zaire, Mahlathini and the Mahotella Queens from South Africa and Coupé Cloué from Haiti, were a smash hit with the public. Around the same time, Justo Valdez, a young musician from San Basilio, founded Son Palenque, Colombia's first soukous group. "But," he says, "I sing in our language and keep many of the *palenque's* traditional elements."

Champeta singers, rappers and DJs sport outlandish attire, nimbly engage in hyperbole, verbal one-upmanship and sexual innuendo, and using unbridled, colourful language, bring audiences to their feet with hot dances that recall *despelote*, currently popular with young Cubans in Havana.

Among the rising stars of Colombian *champeta* and soukous are the Kusima group, Shaka the Zulu King of Cartagena, Cándido Perez ("the doctor of *la terapia*"), Luis Towers and especially Elio "Boom" (Francisco Elio Corrales), a young Black from Turbo in the Antioquia region on the Pacific coast. Boom started performing songs by Panamanian stars in his home village at the age of seven and today lives in Cartagena where he is an idol of the poor. His first two records—*La Turbina* and *El caballero de la champeta criolla.*—sold in thousands. He sings *La Turbina* in the language of his birthplace, which he describes as a mixture of Spanish, Haitian Creole and English. His fame has spread to Panama, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, Jamaica and, by word-of-mouth, the Spanish-speaking communities of the United States.

The commercial success of *terapia criolla* spawned a festival, which took place in the Cartagena bullring for the first time on 2 April, 1997. Headliners included Melchor El Cruel, Alvaro El Bárbaro and Dogardisc y Bustafá. José Quessep, who organized the event, says "*Champeta* has always been thought of as aggressive music for common people and gang members, but we're sure this festival will show that it is also a cultural phenomenon that has taken root in Cartagena and is catching on world-wide."

Brimming with vitality, *champeta* is both nostalgic and a novelty, strengthening the bonds between Africa and the New World, and yet again reflecting the boundless creativity of Blacks in the Americas. ■

SELECTIVE DISCOGRAPHY:

TRADITIONAL MUSIC FROM THE SAN BASILIO PALENQUE:

Colombie: El Sexteto Tabalá, OCORA C 560126

CHAMPETA:

Elio Boom, *El Caballero de la Champeta Criolla*, Rey Records RR 003

Elio Boom, *Sigo Reinando*, Rey Records RR 006

Elio Boom, *Viva la champeta criolla 96*, Flecha Records

SUSAN BUIRGE

'The dancer is a bond between earth and sky'

© Pierre Jean de San Bartolomé, Paris

Susan Buirge is an American choreographer who lives in France, where she is associate artist to the Arsenal in Metz. For some years she has been profoundly influenced by Japanese traditions and civilization, and her most recent work with contemporary Japanese dancers and *gagaku* musicians will be performed at this year's Avignon Festival (15-21 July 1998). A compilation of the notes she made during visits to Far Eastern countries has been published under the title *En allant de l'ouest à l'est, Carnets 1989-1993* (Editions Le bois d'Orion, 1996). Here she is interviewed by Romain Maitra.

■ **What is choreographry for you?**

S.B.: For me, there are basically two kinds of choreographers. There are the visionaries who project their mental images on stage—the American choreographer Alwin Nikolais is a good example of this type—and there are those like myself for whom dance is part of a questioning process. For me, choreography is like a detective novel in which the questions are: who does what? where? when? and how? I leave out "why"? because in choreography the "why" emerges from all the other factors.

■ **Could you tell us something about your methods?**

S.B.: My approach to choreography is not narrative, but abstract. I have developed a process in which a series of questions are asked about the structure, space and time. For example: where the dance is situated on stage, which dancer enters from which side, who begins, and so on. I have evolved a process of questioning in which the answers are given by using the tools of chance—flipping a coin, drawing lots, or throwing dice. This allows me to work on the borderline between what I know and what I do not know. By using methods of construction based on chance I can construct pieces that I could never have imagined otherwise.

I prepare a section of the choreography on a piece of paper, beginning with the structure and the many details of each movement—its direction, which part of the body evokes which quality, its duration, and various other details. Then, working with the dancers in the studio, drawing on their energy and the atmosphere at that specific moment, I read the results of the questions from the paper I have prepared. The dancers have to be very alive and alert to capture the essence of the movement that flows out of my body at that precise moment—because once I repeat it, it loses its initial impact.

■ **Would you agree with the idea that dance is a cerebral art?**

S.B.: I strongly believe that movement in post-modern dance springs from thought, setting aside movements prompted only by animal instincts. The principles of post-mod-

ern dance originate in a certain tradition that can be traced back to theories set forth by Kandinsky and Klee.

When we see choreography as the result of a thought process, we can always feel an underlying sense of construction. All human beings have a basic need to build, in the same way that birds build nests. When choreography is "constructed", spectators can sense its latent structure even if they cannot actually see it or identify it. I think one of the reasons why contemporary dance is interesting and elicits a wide public response is that it responds to this basic need. Of course there is the pleasure of seeing the dancer dance, but there is also something more.

'Human beings have a basic need to build, in the same way that birds build nests. Contemporary dance responds to this need.'

■ **Do you believe that gestures and movements have a cultural origin?**

S.B.: Of course they do. I noticed this when I came from America to France in 1970, but I have felt it even more strongly working with Japanese dancers since 1992. The Japanese live very close to the floor, they take off their shoes when they enter a house, and they kneel for long periods while working or discussing. This relationship to the ground and this sitting posture give them a unique sense of verticality, something quite different from the Western experience. This verticality, incidentally, gives the Japanese very powerful hips and I have taken advantage of this in my work with them.

If there is such a thing as a culture of space, it certainly exists in Japan where space is a highly elaborated code. People do not touch one another in public. Although they are packed like sardines in the subway, there is a feeling that they are not touching. When meeting, there is always a sense of distance between people—not as a divider but as something that brings people together and relates individuals to the community. True contact is based on an absence of physical contact.

This creates a specific approach to the way people work together. This "non-touching" makes the body more vibrant and emphasizes the way it situates itself in space. Japanese dancers are far more keenly aware than Western dancers of where they are in space. Dancer, choreography and space become one. As a choreographer who is passionate about space, I felt entirely at home in Japan.

■ **What else did you learn from your time in Japan?**

S.B.: During my first visit to Japan in 1989, I discovered *bugaku*, a dance form that came to Japan from China in the seventh century and is performed in a strictly confined space. In Japan, special architectural spaces are set aside for dance, whereas in the West dance is always performed in borrowed spaces.

The indigenous traditional dance of Japan is *kagura*, whose many forms are directly related to the agrarian cycle—from planting to harvesting, particularly rice. There are nearly 60,000 *kagura* dance forms still in existence in Japan today. Each is danced but once a year, by the villagers, conceived for a specific place, on a specific date, for a specific reason. We know from written sources that some of these forms have existed for at least a thousand years. All the dances take place in specially created areas which are sometimes destroyed after being used.

These forms are thoroughly choreographed, in other words the dancers do not express themselves spontaneously. Their structures are extremely sophisticated and complex. To my mind they comply with all the principles of post-modern choreographic construction because they are based on process. Most of these dances are performed for the people of the villages, for the well-being of the community, the land and the crops. As such, the dance is the responsibility of the community. Many of these villagers, who may be farmers, craftsmen or postmen in their working lives, are good dancers.

■ **The difference between dance and theatre is a convention that arose relatively late in Europe. Where do you draw the line between the two?**

S.B.: To me, there is a big difference between dance and theatre, and it is essentially a difference of responsibility. Theatre is the art of the city, of the polis. It is a moment when the people of the city gather around a subject that someone has written and that concerns them. Dance is something different. With his feet firmly planted on the earth, his body erect and his head in the sky, the dancer is a bond between earth and sky. In traditional Japanese *kagura*, the dance assumes responsibility for tying what is of the earth to what is of the sky.

Theatre, on the other hand, ties people to each other and to the city. In the West, when dance wants to tell stories, it tends towards theatre. But this is a use or application of dance and not its primary function. Today my work focuses on reaffirming the dancer's responsibility as a link between earth and sky.

■ **Do you think there is a crisis of creativity in traditional dance cultures? Are they finding it hard to adapt to modern sensibilities?**

S.B.: As a contemporary artist, I feel a responsibility to perpetuate traditional dance cultures everywhere. I believe that cultural traditions ▸

and the contemporary arts should exist on an equal footing in every culture. There is need to talk about the distinctions and boundaries between the traditional and the contemporary, but as complementary forms. Some of my own works could never have been created without the ancient Japanese *kagura*. But every culture also needs contemporary artists.

For the Japanese, "contemporary art" is often trendy art from an American or European ethos, something that is not part of their culture. So much contemporary Japanese dance that I have seen is an imitation of well established styles, what has been learnt in dance classes in the United States. Most contemporary Japanese choreographers discard or ignore their cultural traditions. I am interested in how they are going to find their own contemporary art. On the other hand, the Japanese also regard *noh*, *kabuki* and *bugaku* dances as contemporary forms.

Innovations have been taking place in India where Chandralekha, for example, has used the techniques of Bharata Natyam to generate modern sensibilities. Wu Kuo-Chiu from Taiwan, who was trained in Chinese Opera, has worked on *Macbeth* using Chinese opera techniques as well as certain Western ideas about space and decor, and an innovative reconstruction of the narrative.

■ **In the West, dancers retire young, but this does not seem to be the case in the East. Why this difference?**

S.B.: The idea of dance as the image of youth comes from classical ballet. But in contemporary dance this is not so. Mary Wigman and Martha Graham danced long after they were sixty years old, and Jiri Kylian has formed a company of dancers over forty. Nevertheless, contemporary dance is not easy on the body. We aren't made of iron or rubber, and eventually the knees and the hips go! However, some of the thinking about dance in this century has defined beauty as emerging from inside, rather than outside, the body.

On the other hand, there are *bugaku* dances specially conceived for six-year-old children. These are not childish dances, they have strict rules. There is a *bugaku* dance intended for performance by a centenarian. Also there is a "last dance" when one knows one is going to die, a moving way of acknowledging the span of a life gone by. This wonderful idea takes us back to the question of the place of dance in society, of whether it is merely a decorative art or whether it can be functional—like much of what we find in ancient dances in traditional societies.

Choreography cannot go back to ancient times—it must go forward. In our age of information processing, computers and multimedia, the counterpoint of live dance with live music is more necessary than ever. ■

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